



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 18 March 2010

Session 3

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

Thursday 18 March 2010

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Climate Change

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I apologise for the slight delay in starting, but the lens in my glasses fell out and I am completely blind without them.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I am glad that your lens is now in the appropriate place.

Under rule 8.6.1 of the standing orders, I wish to provide clarity on the position of ministers with regard to amendment S3M-5978.2, in the name of Patrick Harvie. A draft application for the Hunterston proposal, referred to in that amendment, was received by the Government on Monday and is currently going through a formal gate-checking process, subject to a formal application being submitted by Ayrshire Power. The ministerial code says:

“To help ensure the fairness and transparency of the planning system the Planning Minister or any other Minister involved in the planning decision, must do nothing which might be seen as prejudicial to that process, particularly in advance of the decision being taken.”

Therefore, at this stage, ministers should not express any particular view other than that they will consider all representations made to them before reaching any decision on the application. It would be inappropriate for the planning minister to speak to or vote on Patrick Harvie’s amendment, beyond explaining why he cannot. I add that ministers always speak and vote within the boundaries of collective responsibility. Consequently, in this matter they share the responsibility of the planning minister to

“do nothing which might be seen as prejudicial to that process”.

That is, they cannot speak to or vote on Patrick Harvie’s amendment. For completeness, I add that the decision to include Hunterston in the national planning framework 2 document is subject to a possible judicial review.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I will answer the first point of order before hearing yours, Mr Harvie.

I am grateful for the minister’s prior notice of his point of order. I am advised that there are no rules about live planning applications in terms of either the admissibility or selectability of an amendment. It is therefore entirely up to ministers how they approach the issue in the debate. I am sure that members will take the minister’s points into account.

Patrick Harvie: You have dealt with my point of order, Presiding Officer. It was merely to seek clarification that there are no constraints on the Parliament that mirror the comments about the ministerial code and that the Parliament is entitled to express a view on the matter, even if ministers are not.

The Presiding Officer: I am happy to confirm that that is the situation.

That being case, we come to the first item of business, which is a debate on motion S3M-5978, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on climate change.

09:18

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I have great pleasure in speaking to and moving the Labour Party’s motion. The Scottish National Party Government has been happy to pay lip service to tackling climate change and to take the credit for the ambitious targets that we all voted through when passing the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, but it has not followed through quickly enough with the decisive action needed to deliver change.

Last month the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change published a report that advised how the Scottish Government’s targets can be met. We need more action and less talk and the debate gives us the chance to talk together about how we move forward. It is essential that we tie our action on climate change to tackling the recession. That is why we have focused on action that supports our economy and creates new jobs and training in low-carbon technologies. We need to use the tools that Labour added to the 2009 act—public sector procurement, the public sector duty and the public engagement strategy—to deliver transformational change. I hope that the minister will report today on the progress that he has made on tackling the key issues that we identified when passing the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009—energy efficiency, energy, transport and land use.

We all know that the lack of a global deal at Copenhagen was massively disappointing, but as political representatives our job is to get on and deliver the promise that we made to developing countries and those at the sharp end of climate change and show that we meant it when we said that we would act. Last summer, we all said that a

we-will-if-you-will approach was not good enough. Our targets are intended to stimulate action and not just support soundbites. The climate change delivery plan that was published in the spring last year aimed to meet only a 34 per cent reduction target. We need a report from the minister on what he has done to revise his plan upwards to meet the tougher targets to which we all signed up.

The UK Committee on Climate Change report is clear that we need new policies to drive the required step change to deliver our targets. That means working with the UK Government and other European Union countries, but it would be totally wrong of the Scottish Government to absolve itself of its responsibility to use its powers to the maximum. The SNP cannot blame others for its lack of delivery on climate change in the past year. It is absolutely clear from the report that the Scottish Government has to deliver more in the non-traded sector. We have no chance of meeting our other targets if we do not get going on transport and buildings, which are core areas in our current emissions.

We are disappointed by the slow rate of progress, although we know that work has been happening—for example, we campaigned for the council tax discount policy, which now looks seriously unambitious. The intention was not to catch up with best practice in England; it was to go beyond it. Will the minister say whether he is happy with the deal that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has put in place? How many houses has he been told will be insulated in the first year? Why is there no sign of action to progress cavity wall insulation, which affects 700,000 houses in Scotland? Why is there nothing on incentives for household renewables?

Although we are still waiting for the energy efficiency targets, parliamentary question after parliamentary question has revealed that householders are simply not making it through the complex filtering of the energy action programme and housing insulation schemes. Those schemes are promising more than they are delivering. We also have the lowest level of new-build housing for decades, so we are not building the new low-carbon developments that are crucial to delivering economies of scale. I will not dwell on permitted development rights for air source heat pumps or mini wind turbines, except to say that we have lost jobs and the situation has been handled appallingly.

Perhaps the minister will talk about the details of the SNP's boiler scrappage scheme. The minister needs to say when it will start, how many houses it will include and whether it will match the £400 discount in England or the £500 discount in Wales. The minister needs to get a move on. Plumbing companies are now worried that they are missing

out because people are delaying ordering their boilers until they see what the Scottish boiler scrappage scheme will consist of.

We need a step change in transport policy. Ministerial cars are symbolic—if they are not low carbon or electric, what message does that send? The rest of the public sector needs a clear lead. The rest of the world is looking at our ground-breaking Scottish companies, such as Allied Vehicles and Axion Technology, but our companies need to start getting serious orders now, not just three or four cars here or there, but fleets. Prices will not come down until we get economies of scale. Today's big announcement by Nissan shows that we in Scotland have to get going urgently. Public sector fleets are crucial—the national health service, local authorities and the whole of the public sector, including Scottish Water and the police, need a co-ordinated approach to kick-start the market and get the value for money that we can deliver.

The Liberal Democrat amendment strengthens our motion. We do not need just the cars and the vans; we need the infrastructure to support them. Let us start in the cities that have the critical mass and the distances to make it work. Glasgow has already made a commitment to infrastructure and orders; we need other cities, such as Edinburgh, to follow. It is not just about cars and vans; it is also about high-quality public transport, more walking and cycling options. Will the minister commit to spending a higher proportion of the transport budget on cycling? Colleagues will talk later about the much greater work that needs to be done in support of the bus industry.

The UK Committee on Climate Change is clear that, on the current trajectory, the non-traded emissions in Scotland are above the level that we need to reach to meet our 42 per cent target. In all cases there is a gap between projections and targets, so we need new policies and a step change. The UK Government played a leading role in trying to secure a deal at Copenhagen and has not given up. A raft of new policies will come into effect this year that will help the Scottish Government to meet Scotland's targets. Renewables will be crucial in meeting those targets. The feed-in tariff kicks in next month and will be a big help in persuading people to introduce into their houses renewables that produce electricity. We need work on low-carbon cars, the electric cars discount, the low-carbon buses initiative and the commitment to high-speed rail, to which we will return in future.

The EU is crucial. In last month's agriculture debate, I raised the subject of supporting our farmers to continue changing their practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We need the EU landfill targets to keep pushing us to do more

on recycling. Every level of Government needs to do its bit, but the Scottish ministers must tell us how they will up their targets in their delivery plan. We need vision, policies and finance to deliver results. We need a step change and we need not only talk about climate change but action. Meeting our aspirations requires a much more collective approach to politics. I hope that the debate will stimulate the Scottish Government to act faster to make the big changes in our economy. We do not want excuses for inaction; we want vision and a timetable for delivery.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the UK Climate Change Committee Report, *Scotland's path to a low carbon economy*; believes that the Scottish Government needs to review its Climate Change Delivery Plan to take into account the passing of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009; believes that there are economic opportunities to be gained from investment in low-carbon technologies and that the Scottish Government needs to take a lead through public procurement, particularly in the fields of transport and construction, and specifically calls on the Scottish Government to put in place a programme to replace its own fleet with low-carbon or electric vehicles and to enable the public and businesses to make the practical changes required to meet the targets set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

09:25

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I hope that it will aid the debate if I say that we are prepared to support Mr Johnstone's and Ms McInnes's amendments.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government. The debate comes at a timely moment, when we have had the chance to absorb and reflect on the outcome of the Copenhagen climate conference at the end of last year.

Like Sarah Boyack, the Government feels that the Copenhagen proceedings were very disappointing. They did not deliver the hoped-for commitments to emission cuts or a timetable for a new treaty, but the Copenhagen accord can be seen as a first step towards a new legally binding international agreement. It captures recognition from major players—the USA, China, India and Brazil among others—of the need to keep the global temperature rise within two degrees of pre-industrial levels and to support adaptation in the developing world. That is an important step forward, as it brings countries to the table that had expressed varying degrees of reservation.

The United Nations tells us that 70 countries have submitted mitigation targets and plans to the accord, representing more than 80 per cent of global energy emissions.

Scotland retains its position among the leading nations prepared to commit to high ambition in tackling climate change. One of the interesting things in the UK Committee on Climate Change's advice is that it draws attention to the fact that, on the basis on which the UK Government has set its targets, our 80 per cent is equivalent to 84 per cent, because of our inclusion of shipping and aviation. We will continue to work with other nations, states and sub-state organisations to influence targets across the world and we will, of course, work closely with the UK and the EU, two of our most important partners that have influence over the majority of the emissions in Scotland—an issue that my amendment addresses.

The UK Government wants to broaden, deepen and strengthen the commitments made at Copenhagen, to secure a legally binding framework and increase the EU commitment from 20 to 30 per cent reductions by 2020, provided that there is high ambition from others. We want that to be converted to an unconditional offer of 30 per cent, and we will campaign and engage to try to achieve that.

As part of our commitment to being a responsible nation, I announced in Paris earlier this month our intention to plant 100 million trees by 2015 as part of a 1 billion tree commitment by the Climate Group's states and regions alliance. That is in the context of a commitment by that alliance to plant one tree for every person on the planet; we are planting 20 for every person in Scotland. That is the kind of policy change that we are implementing. The aims to encourage Governments, businesses and communities worldwide are clear.

We will see a shift in the year ahead to domestic delivery. We are committed to the economic opportunities presented by the low-carbon economy to which Sarah Boyack referred. We provide the certainty that businesses and communities need to plan for a low-carbon future. We are now seeing examples of the low-carbon economy developing at every level in society: in communities, businesses, districts, towns and local authorities. All of society needs to take action. We provide the political driver, working with our colleagues in COSLA, through the new public sector climate action group. Membership is drawn from across the public sector and I co-chair the group with Alison Hay, the COSLA spokesperson for sustainable development.

The subject of Government cars has already arisen. Three years ago, the typical car that we bought had emissions of 138g of CO₂ per kilometre; today the figure is 119g. There have been even bigger reductions in respect of ministerial cars. We have put ourselves on the

road to setting an example and implementing the agenda that we need to pursue.

The advice that we have had from the UK Committee on Climate Change is complex, but very useful. It shows that it is possible for us to meet the 42 per cent objective that we have set ourselves and we will, of course, continue to work towards that 42 per cent, even in the absence of the European Union stepping up its ambition from 20 to 30 per cent. I am sure that that will reassure many in the chamber.

I thought that I heard Ms Boyack say that she campaigned for what has turned out to be an unambitious council tax discount policy. I think that councils are engaged on the issue. Members will remember that we structured things in the way that we did to allow us to continue to have access to carbon emissions reduction target—CERT—money. I think that that is the right approach for us to take.

We are making the kind of progress that befits our ambitions as the leading country on climate change. We have good relationships with the UK Government at both official and ministerial level. I attended two environment councils with Ed Miliband and we have discussed this subject. We have shared ambition. Scotland has a huge contribution to make to UK ambitions and we will work effectively to ensure that we help the UK deliver its ambitions while also ensuring that we in Scotland do the absolute maximum that we can.

I move amendment S3M-5978.1, to insert at end:

“, and urges the European Union and UK Government to take action to support Scotland's ambitious plans and targets.”

09:31

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I am grateful that the minister has committed to supporting both my amendment and that of the Liberal Democrats. Earlier today, Alison McInnes mentioned that my amendment was ungenerous but, typically, the Liberal Democrat amendment is extremely generous with public money. I believe that the two, put together, come to a consensual position that we will be able to support. Consequently, we will support the Lib Dem amendment. I find absolute common ground with the issues that have been brought to the debate by Sarah Boyack's motion, so I will not oppose anything that it mentions.

In the limited time that is available to me, I will concentrate on one aspect of the motion, which is the issue of replacing Government vehicles with more fuel efficient electric or hybrid vehicles in the long term. We face an enormous problem and it is only partly related to the fact that we have a

problem with global warming caused by carbon emissions. We also have a problem that oil reserves will run out in the long term and we have to find an alternative way to operate and run our economy.

The suggestion in the motion that the Government should begin now to replace its fleet of cars with hybrid or electric vehicles is a very good one. It seems likely that, over time, there will be some competition over the technology that we choose to use, but the signs are that the consensus may be heading towards batteries rather than fuel cells as the way to power cars in the future. I understand that the Honda FCX Clarity, which is the most advanced fuel-cell-operated car that is currently available, still costs almost £1 million a unit and, consequently, is unlikely to have an impact in the next 10 or 20 years, so it looks very much as if what we are looking at are electric and hybrid vehicles. For that to happen, we need the Government to commit. That means that I support the principle that the Government should be looking at such vehicles when cars are to be replaced. I would not suggest for a moment that we should be selling off brand new BMWs and replacing them with hybrids this very day, as that is neither energy nor carbon efficient, but when the opportunity arises it should be taken. We also need to look slightly further ahead to find out exactly how the ministerial Prius, or whatever it is, will be refuelled on its long journey to Strichen and back. As a consequence, we must look carefully at the suggestion made in the Liberal Democrat amendment.

If people are to take the risk of buying electric or electric hybrid vehicles, they must believe that they will be able to refuel them as they go around the country. Consequently, it is essential that the Government takes a lead in ensuring that recharging points are available. If we make that move, we will be able to encourage people to make cost-effective decisions to exchange hydrocarbon-fuelled cars for electric or electric hybrid cars, which will benefit the environment, the economy and the owners of those vehicles, as it will be possible to achieve much lower running costs, especially if the system for refuelling them is more broadly available.

The Presiding Officer: I must hurry you.

Alex Johnstone: The Green amendment contains some views that I am highly sympathetic towards, but unless I hear otherwise from the minister during the debate, I believe that it is inappropriate for us to force the Government to express views on an issue on which it is sitting in judgment.

I move amendment S3M-5978.4, to insert at end:

“, also noting that, while preserving the environment must not be seen as being in conflict with economic growth, it is vital that current economic circumstances are recognised and that all public expenditure offers value for money to the taxpayer.”

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am sorry to hurry everyone, but we are very short of time.

09:36

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): The UK Committee on Climate Change's report has made it clear that we can reach our interim goal of a 42 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2020, but it will be hard work. To misquote a famous political saying, we must act early and we must act often. Making early cuts in carbon emissions will be extremely important in easing the path towards that target.

I was delighted that the minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to reaching the 42 per cent target during the launch of the CCC's advice. We are under no illusion that meeting that target will be easy, but by staying the course, Scotland is setting an example for the rest of the world to follow, and I am truly hopeful that we can put pressure on the EU to shake off the disappointments of Copenhagen and toughen its commitments. Let us remember that as well as being key to making a real difference in tackling climate change, stronger international targets will help us to meet our national targets.

I am interested in Sarah Boyack's decision to focus on the Government's car fleet. Although I recognise that heed must be paid to the cost to the taxpayer, I fully agree that the Government should be looking to shift to low or zero-emission vehicles. In the Scottish National Party's first two years in power, the Government car service bought 18 new cars—14 diesels and four hybrids. I acknowledge what the minister said about emissions, and we cannot pretend that reversing that trend will have a huge impact on Scottish emissions—unless I am significantly underestimating the extent to which Mr Stevenson and his colleagues are driven around—but it will set an example. If we are to see the step change in reducing emissions from transport, as well as from buildings, waste and electricity, the need for which the CCC's report highlighted, the Government must take the lead.

I am sure that the minister will recognise the language of my amendment from last summer's climate change delivery plan, in which the planning and development of a battery-charging infrastructure is identified as a must-do for the “transformational change” of a wholesale switch to electric vehicles in the 2020s. Of course, such a switch cannot happen overnight, but if it is to happen at all, people will need to be sure that the

right infrastructure is in place—or, at the very least, that it is properly planned for. Until a comprehensive charging network is planned for, electric cars can never be much more than gadgets—cars for short journeys—with petrol-fuelled cars remaining kings of the A roads. Once plans are in place for a charging infrastructure and there is evidence that the Government and the country are serious about making that change, even if it will not be completed for some years, people can at least start to give electric cars genuine consideration. Nissan's announcement today is very welcome. The private sector is stepping up and the Government needs to match that action.

The UK Government launched its plugged-in places infrastructure framework in November by offering funding to create charging infrastructure in lead cities across the UK. London, north-east England and Milton Keynes were successful in the first round, and several other cities and regions were marked as having made strong bids. Disappointingly, no Scottish city or region was mentioned. Given that the second deadline for submissions is in June, I strongly urge the Government to work with local authorities, businesses and other organisations to share its expertise and seriously explore whether a suitable submission could still be made. I am sure that the minister would agree that it would be a crying shame if Scotland were to miss out not only on the chance to support the early market for electric vehicles, but on helping to shape the future of Britain's transport infrastructure. From this point on, it will be a crying shame if Scotland misses out on any such opportunity.

The Committee on Climate Change made it clear that a step change is needed right across the country. In Parliament and in Government we must show that we are happy to set an example but, equally, we must show that we are serious about providing the infrastructure that is necessary if the rest of the country is to make that change.

I move amendment S3M-5978.3, to insert after “vehicles”:

“, to bring forward the planning and development of a national vehicle battery-charging infrastructure”.

The Presiding Officer: I am grateful that you finished 20 seconds early.

09:40

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The last time that we debated climate change I expressed a little boredom with simply restating the very partial consensus that exists. We have established consensus of intent on where we want to get to, but we have not established consensus on the action that we should take.

It is clear from the Labour motion and what Sarah Boyack said that action is needed on a wide range of policy issues. We all agree that reducing energy demand in the home is a good thing to do, but no Government has yet set out an energy descent path for housing in Scotland and said how we can achieve it.

I agree strongly with what has been said about electric vehicles—indeed, I have made the same case in the past—but until the same issues around demand that we take for granted in relation to energy use and waste are expressed in relation to transport and we recognise that ever-increasing mobility is no longer a public good, let alone a sustainable policy, we will not make progress.

On land use, on food production, on consumerism and on the values that underpin our economy, we need a transformation.

In general, I welcome all the amendments. I am even happy to support Alex Johnstone's amendment, which someone who was less generous than I am might have described as another attempt to demonstrate the message, "If you vote blue, you don't get Green." I agree with Alex Johnstone to the extent that limits on growth should not be seen as a source of conflict, as they are simply the natural state of life in an ecosystem. Therefore, I will not object to his amendment.

Energy is key. A contentious energy proposal has been put forward in recent days—the proposal for a new, largely unabated coal-fired power station at Hunterston. I understand that we cannot force the Government to state its view at this point, but I expect the Parliament to express its view on the proposal at this point.

Let us listen to the views that we have heard from outside the Parliament. RSPB Scotland said:

"This proposal at Hunterston would cause direct environmental harm and result in significant additional greenhouse gas emissions, and should not go ahead as currently proposed. RSPB Scotland does not believe that new, largely unabated coal fired power stations are appropriate in light of our ... climate change targets."

It will come as no surprise that Friends of the Earth Scotland made similar comments, although it was much more succinct and to the point. It said:

"Scotland needs neither new coal nor new nuclear power."

The convener of the church and society council at the Church of Scotland said:

"This proposal represents the first real challenge for the Scottish Government's much applauded climate change act".

On carbon capture and storage, he said:

"This technology is still in its infancy and has never been proven at the scale required to work".

He asked the Parliament

"to reject any new coal fired power station"—

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I, too, am opposed to the Hunterston proposals as they stand, but is it fair to lodge an amendment in the knowledge that ministers cannot vote on it, given that they will have to consider what is a live application? The rest of us can vote on it but, as Alex Johnstone said, it puts ministers in an invidious position.

The Presiding Officer: Had you been here on time, Mr Gibson, you would have heard a point of order on that very issue.

Patrick Harvie: As the Presiding Officer made clear, my amendment is admissible. It is entirely appropriate for us, as members of the Scottish Parliament, to express our view on the issue at this point.

Others views include that of Labour's Lewis Macdonald, who said:

"A new plant in Hunterston now is the wrong technology in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Ross Finnie's proposed members' business motion also makes serious criticisms of the proposal, and I have circulated a paper that contains criticisms of carbon capture and storage technology, which it suggests may be

"a profoundly non-feasible option for the management of ... emissions."

Let us kill off this proposal right now—let us vote against it at 5 o'clock.

I move amendment S3M-5978.2, to insert at end:

“; also opposes new unabated coal power capacity, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to reject plans to build a new coal-fired power station at Hunterston, given that large-scale carbon capture and storage at existing coal or gas plants has never been successfully demonstrated.”

09:44

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, particularly as I am a newer member of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

As has been said, the Parliament's passing of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was an historic landmark. Members worked hard at amending and strengthening the legislation, which was a collective piece of work. After all, we could not have achieved everything we had hoped to achieve without the support of community-based and non-governmental organisation coalitions, and again we have to look to communities for solutions. Now that the act is in place, the Scottish

Government has to follow it up with actions that deliver on its intentions.

Transport and buildings contribute the largest share of emissions in the non-traded sector. However, by concentrating work on those areas, we can make a difference, and efforts to tackle climate change can generate many jobs in new sectors such as alternative energy production and building insulation. We also need to link in essential training for such jobs. Indeed, I was pleased to hear an update on that very matter at Monday's job summit at Dundee College with UK minister Ann McKechin, at which it was pointed out that over recent years many courses in the college have been developed to train people for exactly such job opportunities.

Last year, the trade union group of the campaign against climate change organised a conference of 200 union activists, and the resulting report called for a million new green climate jobs across the UK. It is essential that we in Scotland play our part in reaching that target.

In responding to the report from the UK Committee on Climate Change, which analyses in depth our path to a low-carbon economy, the Scottish Government will have to review its climate change delivery plan. Will the minister ensure that guidance to public bodies has a strong focus on low-carbon procurement? Emissions from transport are, in fact, increasing, but there are still many actions that ministers can take. The Labour motion specifically calls on the Scottish Government to replace its own car fleet with low-carbon or electric vehicles to provide a lead to others. As the Liberal Democrat amendment makes clear, to drive the required step change, the Scottish Government needs to support the provision of electric car-charging infrastructure by, for example, following up and extending the joined cities plan in which Glasgow has been chosen to participate.

Such action would have positive knock-on effects for jobs. For example, in Dundee, advanced battery manufacturer Axion Technology is developing new high-energy battery chemistries that are ideal for plug-in electric vehicles. That work is particularly essential given that from next January the £5,000 plug-in car grant, which is intended to persuade people to transfer to more environmentally friendly electric cars to reduce carbon emissions, will be available throughout the UK.

Climate change is an international issue, and its serious consequences do not respect national boundaries. Indeed, it must be the least national and most internationalist issue that we will have to face in the coming decades, and the maxim "Think globally and act locally" is still relevant. One example of that is the University of Dundee's work

on and involvement in the ACQWA—assessing climate impacts on the quantity and quality of water—project, which is a European Commission-financed five-year international project examining the consequences of climate change for communities in places such as Chile and the Alps, where the melting of mountain glaciers and snow contributes significantly to water resources. However, although the University of Dundee carries out global research, it also acts locally. Last week, it was in the news as the first employer in Tayside to receive the cycle friendly award for encouraging its staff to cycle to work.

It is up to every one of us to change our behaviour in order to reduce our carbon footprint, and I urge the minister as a matter of urgency to take up the challenges that have been identified this morning.

09:48

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 provides the substantial foundations for this country's contribution to the collective international battle against climate change. However, putting down those foundations was, in many respects, the easy part. The hard part is to build on that powerful start by taking the tough decisions that will ensure that we deliver on our targets, and the UK Committee on Climate Change's report leaves no doubt about how tough that work will be.

The 2009 act was passed unanimously by Parliament last June. In the same month, the Scottish Government published its climate change delivery plan, which, as it points out, was prepared as a

"precursor to the more detailed statutory Report on Proposals and Policies to be produced"

this year,

"which will set out how we will meet our annual targets".

That report will, as this morning's motion demands, take full account of the passing of the 2009 act and the UK committee's own recent report.

The motion draws specific attention to transport and, in particular, low-carbon vehicles. That very point has already been covered in the Government's initial delivery plan, in which it is accepted that almost complete decarbonisation of road transport is needed by 2050 with significant progress by 2030 through wholesale adoption of electric cars and vans.

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

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are all tight for time this morning, so I will not.

George Foulkes: Very wise.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Against that background, it is appropriate that the Government plans a programme for ensuring that its fleet comprises only low-carbon or electric vehicles. However, such a move must be combined with the development of the infrastructure required to support the use of plug-in hybrid and electric vehicles across Scotland. Indeed, that step, which would make the decarbonisation of the Government fleet significantly easier, is also referred to in the first delivery plan.

Although it is important for the Scottish Government to lead from the front and change its fleet of 209 vehicles to low-carbon vehicles, I find it difficult to resist the temptation to compare such a move with the carbon reduction that could have been achieved if last week the UK Government had committed to a high-speed rail link all the way to Scotland instead of allowing it to hit the buffers in Birmingham. Moreover, work to deal with the wider public sector fleet has already begun. Very shortly after the 2009 act was passed, the Government issued a consultation on low carbon vehicles, which included the proposal of 100 per cent LCV use in the public sector by 2020. It is a shame that that vision is not shared by Labour's colleagues in the administration at South Lanarkshire Council, which has stated that any updating of electric vehicles is 20 years or more away, or by Glasgow City Council, which has urged the setting of a less ambitious target.

The motion also calls for a programme

"to enable the public and businesses to make the practical changes required to meet"

our targets. No one can disagree with that, but unfortunately time does not permit anything approaching a detailed discussion of the work that is already going on in that respect, including the climate challenge fund and energy assistance package, to name but two of the many projects that are already under way.

The motion is also right to highlight the economic opportunities of investing in low-carbon technologies. The Scottish Government is helping to facilitate such investment with, for example, its decision on the Beaulieu to Denny line and the £10 million saltire prize. Those are two further examples of the work that is already going on.

The first bricks have been laid on the foundations put down by the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Of course, as we all agree, there is much more work to be done, and I look forward to the Government's statutory report on proposals and policies, which will be published later this year.

09:52

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): We all know that we face an enormous challenge, given that, if there are no changes to the EU emissions trading scheme, a 47 per cent reduction in emissions will probably be required in the non-traded sector. As a result, we must be very bold in the positive actions that we take and avoid the negatives at all costs. In that respect, I totally agree with Patrick Harvie that we should reject the largely unabated coal-fired power station proposal for Hunterston.

Of course, good things are happening. For example, I was very pleased by this week's leasing announcement, particularly as it included Pelamis Wave Power, which is based in Leith. However, the announcement was put into perspective by comments from Professor Stephen Salter of the University of Edinburgh, a key figure in the development of wave power, who said that all that was given was a licence and none of the necessary financial support. A month ago today, I visited Pelamis and heard about the issues that it faces. For example, although it does not use a large part of the building in which it is based, the size and height of the building are still taken into account in the rates bill. I have written to the minister on the matter but I believe that, if something cannot be done about such issues, other kinds of financial support must be given to Pelamis and other such companies. The previous Administration's wave and tidal energy support scheme is now closed to new applicants. I know that money is tight but in such times we must look to the long term and few things are more important to Scotland's future than the development of renewable energy.

In any case, the issue is not always money; will is also an issue, and that is certainly the case with regard to cycling. A couple of weeks ago, I praised the tackling obesity action plan's commitment to creating

"environments that make walking and cycling part of everyday life for everyone".

However, when a day or two later I received at my house the bulletin from the cycling organisation Spokes, I was alarmed to read on its front page that

"the SNP government could end up the only Scottish administration"

since devolution

"with total cycle investment lower in every year of office."

Simply moving a small part of the enormous roads budget could make an enormous difference to cycling.

I point out that at the moment very little cycle training is available for young people. Indeed, an

article in the Edinburgh *Evening News* suggested that only one in six children in Edinburgh primary schools receive such training.

The motion refers to public procurement, including public sector vehicle procurement, which is highlighted in the climate change delivery plan. Five years ago, when I was a minister, I was driven around in a hybrid car, which the driver took great pleasure in, and I am astonished to hear that the majority of cars bought by the present Administration have been traditional vehicles. The Government must do something about that, and it must put something about low-carbon procurement in the guidance to local authorities that it must issue under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

The built environment is obviously key. We must get a move on with universal home insulation and with the council tax rebate for energy efficiency and microgeneration measures. The scheme that was announced in Edinburgh this week is inadequate. It comes to only £60, and people have to use Scottish Gas for the work. It is a start, I admit, but much more is needed. We must also get on with permitted development rights for microgeneration. I am sorry to mention my own time in office again, but despite my consulting on the matter in 2006, there is still a proposal on requiring microturbines to be 100m away from the nearest building.

Can we do something about listed building and planning consent for double glazing and similar measures, applications for which are often rejected? The whole Government needs to work across departments on the climate change agenda.

Finally, we must get on with the public engagement strategy.

09:56

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I believe that there is more that unites us than divides us in the debate. As it is such an important subject, I am really sorry that it has been allowed only half the time that it deserves. There are many details that we cannot deal with in the very short time that has been allocated. If Labour really believed in having the debate, it might have given it all the time available this morning. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Rob Gibson: We can see the work that is being done on the abatement of carbon emissions in land use. A nice addition would be to have support from across the Parliament for investment in retaining peat lands. I am glad that Sarah Boyack, Liam McArthur and I have proposed a motion on that. If we invested about £60 million a year, we

would get £120 million back by saving carbon—simply by changing the land use, blocking up drains and so on. We can do that work, but it raises the whole question of money. In these tight financial times, each time someone asks for money to be spent we have to know where it will from.

I wonder whether Malcolm Chisholm and others who want more money to be spent on public procurement, engagement and so on will join me in campaigning in a united fashion against the possible increase in rental charges by the Crown Estate commissioners for our sea bed. That is the rumour. The matter is not within our power, but we should be able to harness the funds to spend in Scotland. Transmission charge costs are huge in the north of Scotland, where the main power sources lie. Do we have a united voice in Parliament to get that money and put it into efforts to address climate change?

It is important for the Government to take a lead and it is a good idea for MSPs to do so, too. I have done so in a small way recently, by using the Energy Saving Trust's scheme to set up thermal solar panels on our house. That followed the recent challenge to MSPs.

Everybody who has £3,000 or £4,000 to invest could be improving their own house. Many people could, instead of going on a holiday to Australia, easily be carrying out those measures in their own country. Of course, many others cannot do that, and we must find the money to support them, too. That is the task before us. I suggest that the moneys that are wasted on rents to the Crown Estate and on paying for transmission charge access could be recycled in that direction.

We will discuss cycling in greater detail when we come to debate the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's active travel inquiry. In the meantime, I have a question for Labour members. If they wanted more money for cycling in the budget, where was their amendment? If we are to discuss such matters, we must ask Labour members to decide, when money is allocated, whether they want it to be used for such purposes; then we can see what the Parliament decides.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

It is important for energy to be made more affordable if vehicles are to be able to run both on electric batteries and on hydrogen. In our area, a hydrogen corridor is being planned between Aberdeen and Inverness. Large fleets of vehicles, such as those that are run by the Royal Mail—it has more than 30,000 vehicles throughout Britain—will be powered by electricity by 2020.

Royal Mail already has a hydrogen vehicle operating in Stornoway, and it is seeking sites for others. We have been involved in supporting such measures, and the Government has supported the hydrogen corridor. It is precisely those elements, involving the private sector and major bodies working in partnership with the Government, that will allow us to achieve the aims that we all want to achieve.

10:00

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): I congratulate Shirley-Anne Somerville on one of the best arguments in favour of the Edinburgh tram scheme that I have heard. I look forward to her continuing support for it outwith the chamber.

Scottish Executive ministers are rightly asking us all to be aware of the dangers of global warming and to recognise that we all contribute to climate change by our individual actions. They urge us all to change our habits and reduce our carbon footprints. However, as Alison McInnes said, as MSPs—particularly those of us in positions of leadership—we need to lead by example. I commend my colleague Sarah Boyack for setting a very good example by regularly travelling here and elsewhere by bike. I also commend Stewart Stevenson, the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change—and I really mean this—for regularly using public transport for official engagements.

There the leadership comes to a sudden, dramatic stop as far as the Scottish Executive is concerned. For the past three years I have been asking parliamentary questions to try to shame ministers into changing their travel arrangements so that they are more environmentally friendly. Apart from Stewart Stevenson, they all seem shameless. One PQ covered a random three-week period in which Stewart Stevenson took 15 journeys by train, Richard Lochhead managed one, but none of the other ministers took to the railways.

In August 2009, I asked for information on all the rail journeys that were undertaken by cabinet secretaries and ministers during the previous financial year. Again, Stewart Stevenson led the way, but Nicola Sturgeon, Keith Brown, Adam Ingram, Alex Neil, Stewart Maxwell, Kenny MacAskill, Fergus Ewing and even the Minister for Environment, Roseanna Cunningham, could not be prised out of their luxurious ministerial limousines on to public transport. Who wins the trophy? The First Minister, of course. He probably has the biggest carbon footprint of anyone in Scotland. He has never travelled by public transport on any official engagement. His journeys by official car include one from Bute house to 10

George Street. I could do that in two minutes. *[Laughter.]* I mean on foot.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

George Foulkes: The minister can make his point when he replies to the debate.

The First Minister regularly rides in style on the short journey from St Andrew's house to Holyrood, missing the glory of the Royal Mile. It is a journey that he and I could do to our advantage if we walked it regularly. Indeed, that is what I do, probably because I know that there is a guarantee that I will not meet the First Minister as I walk.

I also lodged a number of parliamentary questions asking what each individual minister and cabinet secretary is doing to reduce their carbon footprint, but I have received only holding answers.

The greatest hypocrisy and irony came last December, when the First Minister went uninvited to the Copenhagen conference on climate change, taking with him no fewer than 10 officials, at a cost of nearly £3,000 and adding to the climate change problem. He compounded the irony by agreeing a statement with the President of the Maldives, and now he is going to fly to the Maldives, where the water is rising. If the First Minister keeps flying to the Maldives, they will be covered with water before long.

For Alex Salmond—this is a serious point—it is not do as I do but do as I say. If we followed his example, the dangers of climate change would increase exponentially. We all have to set an example. Until Alex Salmond is removed from office—which will not be very long from now—I urge everyone to follow the examples of those of us who are proud to travel using the excellent bus service in Edinburgh and the excellent railways throughout the United Kingdom.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): We move to wind-up speeches.

10:04

Patrick Harvie: I think that George Foulkes's recent parliamentary questions have given us good value for money. I am sure that I can say with confidence that he has forsworn ever to use domestic aviation again for travel from London back up to Scotland.

In my opening speech, I referred to a research paper—which I have circulated to Opposition parties and to the Government—that informs our comments on carbon capture and storage and our attitude to the Hunterston proposal. I have no doubt that the paper will not be the last word on carbon capture and storage and I agree that

research should be undertaken to explore whether the technology is possible. However, let me quote from the abstract of the paper, which was published in the *Journal of Petroleum Science & Engineering*. It states:

“Published reports on the potential for sequestration fail to address the necessity of storing CO₂ in a closed system. Our calculations suggest that the volume of liquid or supercritical CO₂ to be disposed cannot exceed more than about 1% of pore space. This will require from 50 to 200 times more underground reservoir volume than has been envisioned by many, and it renders geologic sequestration of CO₂ a profoundly non-feasible option for the management of CO₂ emissions.”

Under “Conclusions”, the authors state that the findings of the research do not bode well

“for geologic CO₂ sequestration and ... clearly suggest that it is not a practical means to provide any substantive reduction in CO₂ emissions, although it has been repeatedly presented as such by others.”

As I said, the research paper will not be the last word on CCS, but it throws serious doubt on the technology.

CCS might work one day, but we do not know that yet. Therefore, it would be quite wrong to approve new coal-fired capacity, whose emissions would be largely unabated even with an element of CCS, simply on the basis of a technology that currently remains speculative and which might—only might—be available in future. If CCS does not work, we will be left with the suggestion—the words are, I think, at least a couple of decades old—that a recent Friends of the Earth conference heard from Nimmo Bassey, who said simply:

“leave the coal in the hole”.

Therefore, I am happy to sign Ross Finnie’s motion opposing the Hunterston proposal, but that cannot be enough. The Parliament should reject the proposal by agreeing to an amended motion at decision time today.

On electric vehicles, which have been the subject of much focus during the debate, I agree with much that has been said, especially about charging infrastructure. In our big cities, such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, much of the property is composed of tenemental accommodation. I live on the third floor of a tenement. If I was going to buy a car, why on earth would I buy a car that I could not charge even in my own street? The installation of charging points in such streets is possible—they could run off street lamp or domestic electricity supply—but will not be cheap or easy. Thought needs to be given to how it will be done, otherwise no one will buy those much more efficient cars when they come on to the market. I agree that opportunities exist for public sector procurement. Changing how we use procurement does not mean spending more money; it means spending it differently.

On cycling, which Malcolm Chisholm highlighted, some of the small-scale, cheap-and-easy transport measures simply do not have anything like the political momentum behind them that has been given to the most vast, wildly expensive transport projects that will actually make climate change harder to deal with. One example of that is high-speed rail, on which there are two views. Unless we are willing to constrain domestic aviation, high-speed rail will not bring an environmental benefit. We must challenge the prominence of mobility in the transport debate.

10:08

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): This has been a brief but useful debate, not least in confirming that George Foulkes is stalking the First Minister’s every carbon footprint. The debate has also re-emphasised that, despite all the talk of world-leading pieces of legislation, the action that we take—and that alone—will determine whether we achieve what the UK Committee on Climate Change report describes as “challenging but achievable” targets.

Like my colleague Alison McInnes, I welcome the minister’s commitment to the 42 per cent interim target. I acknowledge that the process of getting there will not be easy or straightforward, but progress will not be made any easier if ministers and their officials fail to engage fully and in early course with those who are expected to contribute. The attempt to put NorthLink Ferries sailings to the northern isles on reduced power is a case in point. I trust that the minister has learned lessons from the way in which that consultation was handled.

Although ferry sailings might be lower down the list of priorities for other members, common cause can surely be found—this was demonstrated during the debate—on the development and roll-out of low and zero-carbon vehicles. As Alison McInnes rightly pointed out, the Government has as yet failed to grasp the opportunity to lead by example. If we are to see the widespread take-up of electric vehicles that was part of the transformational change called for in the climate change delivery plan, ministers must make early efforts to remove obstacles by making a commitment to put in place the necessary infrastructure. Alex Johnstone made some excellent points about the link between Government commitment and public confidence. At this stage, that might go no further than ensuring that such infrastructure is being properly planned for, but we certainly need to see evidence that the issue is being taken seriously by ministers.

As Alison McInnes pointed out, in contrast to south of the border where charging infrastructure

has been introduced under the plugged-in places project, nothing appears to be happening so far in Scotland. Ministers must work with local authorities, businesses and others to explore options for submitting a bid later in the year. I know that there is certainly an appetite for that in my constituency. Notwithstanding Sarah Boyack's and Patrick Harvie's comments about Glasgow and Edinburgh, Orkney seems, on the face of it, ideally suited to developing electric car infrastructure, given the limited mileages that are travelled. Likewise, given the on-going restrictions of grid capacity—an issue that I hope can and will be resolved in the near future—piloting an electric vehicle roll-out in Orkney would help to mop up excess local electricity generation that cannot be exported at present. The offer is there, if the minister chooses to take it up. In return, I can confirm that the Liberal Democrats will support the minister's amendment at decision time.

We will also support Patrick Harvie's amendment. I entirely agree with what has been said about the impact that the addition of 1,200MW of unabated emissions from a new coal-fired power station at Hunterston would have on our climate change objectives. CCS has an important role to play in the abatement of existing emissions. That is why we support the proposals for Longannet. By contrast, the proposal for Hunterston would in effect drive a coach and horses through the Government's stated ambitions.

The Tory amendment could be interpreted as a wish that efforts to tackle climate change be put on the back burner. Like others, I welcomed the emergence of Alex Johnstone's late-blossoming green side during the passage of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill. While not entirely convincing, his performance was undoubtedly touching to watch. However, I was reassured by his opening speech in the debate, so we will support his amendment.

The time constraints, as others have observed, have prevented any real, substantive discussion of the range of issues on which detail is crucially needed, but the message from today's parliamentary debate has been clear. I hope that the minister will now heed that message and, in the words of Alison McInnes, act early and act often.

10:12

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased that the Labour Party has chosen to make climate change the topic of its debating time today, given the pressing need for Scotland to make progress towards a low-carbon economy in order to achieve the targets in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. However, like others, I think

that the subject would have been worthy of a full morning's debate to allow a more in-depth discussion of the important issues that have been raised in the recently published UK Committee on Climate Change report and by many members this morning.

It is clear that Scotland's interim target of a 42 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020, in comparison with 1990 levels, is ambitious. With some sectors unlikely to achieve that target, others will need to achieve significantly more if the economy-wide target of a 42 per cent cut in emissions is to be reached. However, there are real opportunities for reducing emissions from the energy-intensive industries that are covered by the EU emission trading scheme, particularly in the power sector, where the investment in renewable electricity that is already well under way also has the potential to open up significant employment and other economic benefits. In that area, the Government is well aware of its important enabling role. However, my party believes that, in order to ensure secure, affordable, low-carbon energy, we need a balanced mix of energy provision in which renewables and nuclear are complementary.

In the short time available, I will touch briefly on the non-traded sector, which the Committee on Climate Change believes will need to achieve up to 47 per cent cuts in emissions if we are to meet the economy-wide target of 42 per cent. That is a tall order, for which sustained co-operative working will be required among Government, businesses large and small, and individuals. However, the target is reckoned to be achievable by adopting a wide range of measures—which have been amply expanded on by Sarah Boyack and others—such as improved energy efficiency, increased levels of heat penetration, cars that are more fuel and carbon efficient and reduced agricultural emissions.

Ahead of the debate, members received two briefings from RSPB Scotland, of which I declare my membership, and NFU Scotland, which make some important points about land use and climate change. RSPB Scotland highlights the opportunities to reduce emissions significantly through the restoration and conservation of our peatlands—an issue that Rob Gibson touched on. Our peatlands are of international repute and are recognised as important carbon sinks. Peatland restoration is cited as being cheaper than many other forms of carbon abatement, and it has the benefit that a single initial expenditure can lead to indefinite carbon reduction and long-term carbon sequestration. It also brings financial benefits through local employment and tourism.

NFU Scotland rightly stresses the importance of farming to food security while accepting that food production will always lead to some emissions. If

our growing world population is to be fed, a sustainable agricultural industry is essential, and appropriate management of nutrients, livestock and soil can ensure that food production methods become more sustainable. Further research into those areas will help the industry to continue its fight against climate change. There has already been some success, with UK emissions of methane and nitrous oxide down by 17 per cent since 1990 and CO₂ emissions down by 5 per cent since 2006.

I mention the RSPB and NFUS briefings to illustrate the important contribution that land use can make in fighting and adapting to climate change. We must urgently develop a strategy to manage the complexities, conflicts and opportunities around land use so that its future potential can be realised. I hope that the Government will produce its proposed land use strategy soon.

Today, we have heard several important and interesting speeches from members, but we have only scratched the surface of how we can reach our targeted low-carbon economy. I have no doubt that the topic will be revisited many times in the chamber in the months and years ahead. We will support the motion and the Liberal Democrat and SNP amendments.

10:17

Stewart Stevenson: Parliamentary debates on climate change have thus far produced consensus, and today's debate has been no exception. I join other members in welcoming the £220 million that the European Investment Bank is providing to Nissan to build a facility at Sunderland where up to 50,000 electric cars a year will be produced. Nissan states that it will provide the first mass-market, affordable electric car. We will watch that with considerable interest.

Cycling has been raised several times. I, too, read the Spokes bulletin. Spokes chooses to focus only on what the Government spends, not on what is spent on cycling in Scotland, and one can reach very different conclusions if one looks at the whole picture. Particularly in cycling, delivery works well if it is led at the local level. In the past, I have referred to the efforts of Moray Council, but there are many other councils with cycling initiatives, including East Lothian Council, which has good schools practice. I mention those two councils only because I am familiar with their initiatives, not for any other reason.

We published a sustainable procurement action plan in October 2009 that includes guidance on climate change issues, low-carbon vehicles, renewable energy and so on. We also have contracts in place for information and

communications technology improvements and for lighting and water supply to our offices that show that we are taking action. Public sector engagement has been mentioned several times. Work on a strategy and a linked behaviour change research programme is under way, and the public engagement strategy is being developed.

Time permits me to turn to only a few of the things that have been said in the debate. Alison McInnes welcomed our continuing commitment to a 42 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2020. We will work together with the Parliament on that.

Patrick Harvie made the point that we must reduce energy use in the home, and we are engaging on that subject. However, he said that, even in the context of electric vehicles, increasing mobility is not a public good. There will be less consensus across the Parliament on that. Given the present climate in which we continue to burn oil out of the ground for much of our transport infrastructure, I accept that while we have seen huge improvements in the fuel economy of vehicles it is not appropriate for people simply to increase the amount of travelling that they do, as that would lead to a rising curve of oil consumption. That points to some of the limitations of viewing tackling climate change as simply an engineering problem. Particularly in relation to oil use, it is an issue with a human aspect to it as well.

Malcolm Chisholm rather unwisely referred to the use of hybrid vehicles in his time as a minister. The hybrid vehicles in which he travelled emitted 215g of CO₂ per kilometre, whereas the vehicles that we now procure—which all have diesel engines—emit only 149g of CO₂ per kilometre. That is a 31 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions.

Sarah Boyack: Will the minister give way on that point?

Stewart Stevenson: I do not have time. My apologies.

I use that illustration to make the general point that considerable work is going on to improve all the technologies that are deployed in transport. Governments of all shades, including the Scottish Government, do not have a particularly good track record in betting on winning technologies. We must, therefore, ensure that we have a variety of technologies going forward, as we just do not know what will work best. Hydrogen fuel cell technology will complement the work that is going on to develop electric vehicles.

George Foulkes provided some good, knockabout stuff. He referred to the three weeks in which Stewart Stevenson made so many journeys. It is true that I did. I am going to upset a former school colleague. I went to school with Nina

Myskow, who is one of the ladies who appear on "Grumpy Old Women". I am a grumpy old man who does not like Christmas, and I happen to be the minister who was on duty for four days over the Christmas period, therefore my travel plans were entirely different from those of other ministers. Believe me, we get the message and we are on the case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that, on that happy note, you must stop, minister.

10:22

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): The minister said that Scotland is leading the way on tackling climate change. Sarah Boyack called for vision, policy and action. Much has been made of the ground-breaking nature of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and rightly so. Now, we need to move forward rapidly on the basis of that legislation, matching it with equal ambition and action.

Sarah Boyack highlighted the crucial importance of action in the domestic, non-traded sector. Housing and transport clearly offer scope for individual and collective action. The Scottish Government must facilitate and encourage such action through awareness raising, public engagement and, as George Foulkes pointed out, leading by example. It must also create the mechanisms to provide adequate resources to encourage people to make changes in their lifestyles as well as improvements in their homes and travel arrangements.

Rob Gibson talked about the Government leading by example, not only in respect of its own property and vehicles but through its ability to direct public bodies and local authorities and through its influence on business, the voluntary sector and home owners.

As Malcolm Chisholm and Marlyn Glen showed, there is the potential to develop more active travel and adopt cleaner, lower-carbon vehicles. We must, however, ensure that active travel is safe and easy. There is little point in encouraging children to use bicycles if it is not safe for them to cycle on the roads to school. We must also ensure that early adopters of electric and hybrid vehicles are properly supported by an expansion of the charging infrastructure. I welcome Alison McInnes's suggestion that the Scottish Government should develop a network of charging points.

Malcolm Chisholm spoke about Pelamis Wave Power, which is based in his constituency. Renewables are an essential element of our climate change programme, and it is difficult to understate the importance of green jobs to our economic future, as Marlyn Glen said.

The Scottish Government's role in promoting action is particularly important when it comes to public procurement and public engagement. Beyond what is provided for in the 2009 act, Scottish ministers must make further provision for public duties. I know that they have consulted local authorities and other public bodies, but it is about time that they came back to Parliament with the results of that exercise and a recommendation for those public duties. Of course, a timescale for some action would be helpful.

It is vital that public duties recognise the role that procurement can play in setting examples and stimulating innovation in the development of low-carbon products and services. It is equally vital that that is done in co-operation with the public, local authorities and communities. We will not be successful if we do not win the hearts and minds of the Scottish people. When will the Scottish Government properly take that on board and set in motion a comprehensive programme for public engagement? It is vital that people sign up.

Alison McInnes talked about taking action early and often. Infrastructure is vital. Let us get on with it.

The subject of the next debate this morning is a good example of a way in which we can fulfil our climate change and other objectives. We can stimulate the economy, save jobs and provide accessible public transport and greener and environmentally friendly transport. All that we need to do is to introduce and support improvements and commit to them in the long term. When it comes to climate change, we cannot wait for the long term; we need to act in the short term.

Alexander Dennis Ltd is a prime example of a successful Scottish company—based in Falkirk—that will continue to be a successful Scottish company if it overcomes the economic downturn that has come about as a result of the recession. We need new hybrid bus technology. There are enormous benefits to building technology here in Scotland—benefits to people and in terms of the economy and climate change. I urge the Scottish Government to heed the voices that are being raised in support of that.

At the Copenhagen conference, the Scottish Government was delighted to receive praise for the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and I was proud that this Parliament had passed such legislation. We need to demonstrate that we can deliver on that legislation and meet the targets. We must not allow the Scottish experience to become one of delays and missed opportunities.

In Copenhagen, there were posters everywhere that showed world leaders saying:

"I'm sorry. We could have stopped the catastrophic climate change... We didn't."

We need to act now so that we do not have to say sorry to future generations.

I am pleased that we have had this debate. I hope that we have many debates on this subject and that the Government has the chance to come to the chamber to report on its progress. I hope that we all participate in that progress and continue to push for real action to be taken. I hope that the Scottish Parliament can be proud of the legislation and not say, "Hey, it was a good idea, but we're sorry it didn't work."

Buses

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-5973, in the name of Charlie Gordon, on building better buses.

10:28

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): The motion that I rise to move is identical to a motion that I lodged for a members' business debate next month, which attracted cross-party support from most major parties in the chamber, except for the Tories. Margaret Thatcher once notoriously suggested that any adult travelling by bus was a failure. If that is the reason why Tory MSPs have failed to back Scotland's bus manufacturing industry, they need not have worried—everybody already knows that they are failures anyway. Perhaps the sinners will repent today.

Cross-party support for the better buses campaign is a recognition of its manifest policy benefits in terms of action on climate change, jobs, value for money for the public purse and the social inclusion of thousands of Scots whose mobility is impaired.

We accept the Scottish Government's amendment to my motion—after all, it involves something for which Labour has been calling for some time: using the bus service operators grant to incentivise operators to switch to low-carbon-emission buses. However, such revenue support is no substitute for a capital grants scheme similar to the United Kingdom Government's greener buses scheme, which is what we seek. We also accept the Liberal Democrat amendment, although it calls for something to happen that is already happening.

A powerful case was made in this morning's debate on climate change for early, practical action to achieve Scotland's ambitious targets by, for example, converting Scottish Government cars to cars that run on electricity. Another change that could bring more environmental benefits would be to convert Scotland's bus fleets to ones that run on greener power, such as the hybrid bus that is produced by Alexander Dennis Ltd of Falkirk, with its 35 per cent fewer emissions and 30 per cent fuel savings. That change would also help to ensure the survival of a world-class bus manufacturing plant—Scotland's sole surviving one—where more than 900 workers are on short time.

Some members complained that this morning's climate change debate should have been longer and that we should not have had two shorter debates this morning. I can only say that Labour

does not apologise for moving 900 bus manufacturing jobs further up the political agenda. Let us be patriotic. Let us help to save Scottish jobs for Scottish workers.

Good news for ADL, courtesy of the UK Government, was reported yesterday in *The Scotsman*:

“BAE systems said yesterday that the first of the hybrid electric systems that will power 56 Stagecoach double-deck buses in Oxford and Manchester have been delivered to manufacturer Alexander Dennis.

They are the first of up to 300 hybrid electric buses that will be supplied to operators across the UK with support from the UK Department of Transport's £30 million Green Bus Fund, which provides financial incentives to adopt green technologies.”

That gets to the very heart of the matter.

Cross-party consensus—even unanimity—is all very well, but we must will the means as well as the ends. We on the Labour benches still feel the hurt of the thousands of disabled Scots on the lower rate of disability living allowance who, despite the Parliament unanimously passing a resolution as recently as 12 December 2009 that they should be given free bus travel, were let down when costings were rejected by the Scottish Government in budget negotiations. That is why we insist on a Scottish equivalent of the greener buses fund. However, it is not the only reason.

As is made clear in a briefing that was e-mailed to all MSPs by Strathclyde partnership for transport, substantial savings can be achieved by public sector capital acquisition and ownership of buses that are deployed for school transport, demand-responsive transport and scheduled services. Similar benefits were recounted to Shirley-Anne Somerville and me during a recent committee visit to Dumfries and Galloway Council, and Sir John Arbuthnott's recent report on shared services identified vehicle utilisation's potential for efficiency gains and cost benefits in the public sector.

The cleaner, greener, better-value buses that are made in Scotland are also fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, so this policy agenda could give full accessibility to thousands of Scots with impaired mobility far sooner than is provided for in UK-reserved legislation.

There we have it: a comprehensive, cross-cutting case that is deserving of cross-party support. I respectfully ask for cross-party support for better buses. I hope for unanimous support for better buses, but I demand equitable funding for better buses to be made in Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that some transport authorities have secured better value for money when tendering for

bus services by purchasing vehicles themselves rather than incurring costs that include a vehicle supplied by the bidders; further notes the flexibility and efficiency of the five Alexander Dennis Limited (ADL) ALX 300 buses operating in the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport area, which are fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and which have variable numbers of seats in various configurations enabling one vehicle to be used for demand-responsive services, school services and local scheduled bus services in the course of a single day; considers that to the proven efficiency and social benefits of such buses should be added the environmental and jobs benefits of increasing production of ADL's new hybrid bus, which is compliant with both DDA requirements and with emissions targets, but notes with concern that over 900 workers at ADL, Scotland's sole bus manufacturer, are on a three-day week, and calls on the Scottish Government, as a matter of urgency, to fund grants for acquisition of ADL buses by transport authorities and by commercial bus operators to ensure a new generation of bus-build that secures Scottish jobs and skills, world-class bus manufacturing in Falkirk and the provision of world-class transport for the Scottish public.

10:35

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Government recognises the importance of bus services and bus manufacturing to the development of a climate of sustainable growth for our economy and, specifically, for the bus industry in Scotland. I welcome many of Mr Gordon's remarks, and I agree with a significant number of them, especially his comments about Alexander Dennis Ltd, which is a fantastic Scottish manufacturing success. For a number of years, the Government has been pleased to give support to Alexander Dennis, to the tune of £1.4 million, to support its research and development activities. On a visit to the factory, I have seen for myself the tremendous skill and quality of the workforce.

I very much welcome the company's announcement that it is returning to a five-day week at its Falkirk plant from April. I am surprised that Mr Gordon did not mention that, and that it is not in the Labour motion, because it has been public knowledge for some time. However, I am delighted that the company has been able to overcome some challenging economic circumstances. I would be the first to concede that this has been a difficult time for the Scottish economy, and I applaud the skill and achievement of the management of Alexander Dennis in navigating its way back to a five-day week. I also applaud the tremendous contribution of the company's workforce, which have had to make sacrifices in their working conditions and remuneration to ensure the sustainability and survival of a jewel in the Scottish manufacturing crown. The company's return to a five-day week has been achieved by continued investment in new and emerging technologies to keep it at the forefront of bus and coach manufacturing.

Parliament has just debated climate change. Public transport networks have a significant role to play in changing the nature of the journeys that we all undertake. Buses are very much a part of the solution and of efforts to encourage modal shift from cars. Bus services represent a credible alternative. The Government is focusing a great deal of its attention on two principal approaches to encouraging the greater use of bus services and ensuring that we expand support for environmentally friendly bus services.

We have been considering the bus service operators grant, which is paid to support bus services. We recently entered an agreement with the Confederation of Passenger Transport to increase the funding for the BSOG to £66.5 million a year. The Government intends to move to a reconfigured scheme that delivers increased benefits for the money that is invested. From April, the Government will include an incentive for the operation of low-carbon vehicles, including hybrid vehicles, which will equate to an increase of 100 per cent of the grant for each low-carbon vehicle. As part of the agreement with the CPT, we will work with it to consider how the BSOG can change in future to become more closely aligned with Government aims, including those on climate change.

I recognise that local government is best placed to identify the actions that are necessary to deliver local transport aims. That is enshrined in the concordat, and includes the tendering of local bus services. Good-quality vehicles that can be used flexibly can be effective and can promote modal shift. However, the decision whether to purchase bus vehicles in order to reduce tender costs is for local government to consider. In principle, I support any initiative that improves the provision of services and tackles emissions.

For its part, the Government has provided £1 million in funding to enable Strathclyde partnership for transport to purchase up to five hybrid buses and to provide information on their performance. That will allow an assessment of Government intervention, the effectiveness of hybrid vehicles in contributing to emissions reductions, running costs and value for money of hybrid vehicles. I understand that the tender process for the initiative is well under way, and that Alexander Dennis is one of the companies involved in that process, which gives the company an opportunity to access a procurement initiative funded by the Scottish Government for leading-edge, low-carbon vehicles. Members from all sides of Parliament must accept that there has to be a full and open procurement process for any such activities. That is the requirement of the law, and the Government must operate within that context.

The bus industry is a series of private-sector companies operating in an open market. The Government supports the operation of the open market, balanced with intervention by local authorities where required. What I would like, and what Government policy is designed to achieve, is a focus on increasing innovation in the types and use of vehicles that are emerging. That is what Alexander Dennis is achieving with low-carbon technology, service provision, customer service, marketing and infrastructure.

Given its flexibility, efficiency and accessibility, bus transport is an essential part of growing our economy, now and in future. The bus industry has a contribution to make to climate change and modal shift, and, in Alexander Dennis, to increasing the opportunity for one of Scotland's major manufacturing success stories to continue to make a significant contribution to the development of the Scottish economy.

I move amendment S3M-5973.1, to insert at end:

"and notes changes to the Bus Services Operators Grant scheme promoted by the Scottish Government that will promote more environmentally friendly buses."

10:41

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

Encouraging more people on to buses, thereby tackling climate change, which we were talking about earlier, and easing congestion, would be easier if all the buses that we want people to use were pleasant and modern and provided easy access for all ages and abilities. That means that we need to encourage and support research and development in bus design. Alexander Dennis Ltd is at the forefront of such innovation. I am proud that Britain's biggest and Scotland's only bus manufacturer produces the UK market-leading range of single and double-deck chassis and bodies from its manufacturing centres in Falkirk, Guildford and Scarborough.

We are right to be concerned about the difficulties that ADL faces as a result of the recession. As has been remarked already, the workers at its Falkirk plant have been on a reduced working week since September. That not only shows the fragility of the market at the moment but demonstrates the tenacity and determination of those workers. A modern, accessible, well-designed, flexible fleet—I am not referring to bendy buses—means that buses could become the transport of choice for many more people. It also means that, as Charlie Gordon said, buses could provide a variety of different services. Local authorities are already finding that greater efficiencies are to be won through the integration of school bus services, supported services and social-work vehicles. Sophisticated

information technology systems have allowed that progress, when for many years it was only imagined. Buses that once would have been parked in the depot between 10 o'clock and 4 o'clock are now being used during the day to meet other transport needs.

Strathclyde partnership for transport has gone down the route of purchasing fleet but it is not necessarily a model that will be applicable throughout Scotland. As a model 3 regional transport partnership, SPT is funded differently from the other RTPs, and is therefore almost uniquely placed to be able to afford to purchase, maintain and store buses. Although there is room for a great deal of improvement in some of the buses running on the streets of our cities, we should not lose sight of the fact that major bus companies in Scotland have spent more than £500 million on new low-floor, greener vehicles over the past 10 years. Mr Gordon says that I am calling for something that is already in place. That is not the case. The green bus fund is flawed. It does not take old buses out of commission and it has not been enough to stimulate growth and new jobs.

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This is the first that I have heard of the Liberal Democrat proposal for a bus scrappage scheme. Such a scheme would happen at UK level. Will Alison McInnes explain what her party has been doing at UK level to introduce the proposal?

Alison McInnes: The scheme is something that we have been campaigning on, and that we will introduce. I am sure that we will speak about it in the budget next week. However, through the consequentials, it will clearly have an effect in Scotland.

We are challenging the Labour Party to go further than its proposals this morning. Our amendment outlines the benefits to be had from a low-carbon bus fleet and, as has been said, calls on the Government to introduce a bus scrappage scheme in next week's budget. Labour has a golden opportunity next week to take up our suggestion and give tangible support to the bus manufacturing industry. We have suggested that we would invest £60 million in a bus scrappage scheme that helps bus companies to replace old polluting buses with new low-carbon ones and creates jobs.

As much as 20,000 tonnes of CO₂ would be saved as a result of such a scheme. Diesel emissions, particularly from older vehicles, are, of course, the biggest problem in our large towns and cities, and poor air quality has serious implications for public health; indeed, it causes tens of thousands of premature deaths in the UK each year. Our proposal would have a significant impact on reducing air pollution and carbon emissions. It

would also create an economic stimulus. It could result in as many as 200 new jobs for Scotland. The economic boost to bus manufacturing would be considerably greater than that from the grant scheme that Labour has proposed, and companies such as ADL would be given greater certainty.

It is good that, as John Swinney said, ADL workers will return to a five-day working week from April. That follows the news that ADL is the first manufacturer that supplies the British market to have a double-deck hybrid—the Enviro400H—certified at Euro 5. Bringing in a bus scrappage scheme in the budget would be an acknowledgement that the Government values ADL's research and development efforts. Such a scheme would also support a strand of the UK bus and coach industry's greener journeys campaign by driving investment in low-carbon buses.

The Government introduced a car scrappage scheme to boost demand for new cars and stimulate car manufacturing. That was justified on economic, employment and environmental grounds. The same applies in this context. We urgently need a scrappage scheme for buses and coaches.

I move amendment S3M-5973.2, to insert at end:

“; notes that a number of UK cities, including Aberdeen and Glasgow, did not meet EU air pollution targets in 2009; further notes that poor air quality causes tens of thousands of premature deaths across the UK each year; believes that a bus scrappage scheme, making grants available to bus operators to replace old, polluting buses, would have a serious impact on reducing air pollution and carbon emissions, and further believes that the benefits to the environment and the economic boost to bus manufacturers will be considerably greater if the UK Government announces funding for a bus scrappage scheme in the Budget on 24 March 2010.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Partly due to a pull-out, members can now, if they wish, have a minute more to speak than they expected.

10:46

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. Perhaps you should have waited until after I had spoken, as that would have shortened the process a bit more.

I was amazed by the aggressive nature of Charlie Gordon's opening speech; indeed, I was nearly knocked off my perch. If that is Charlie Gordon's approach to consensus, I would not like to hear him when he is angry. I get the impression that an election is on the way. We had better be careful about how we go. However, the Conservatives will support his motion, whether he likes it or not, because Alexander Dennis Ltd is a genuinely national and European leader, and

possibly a world leader. Its plant at Falkirk is an example of a Scottish success.

In his opening speech, Mr Gordon mentioned Margaret Thatcher and her impact on manufacturing. Statistics now exist that indicate that the decline of manufacturing has accelerated by a factor of three in 13 years of Labour government. That figure alone makes it all the more notable that ADL has succeeded as well as it has.

I, too, welcome the news that ADL workers will be able to return to full five-day working. That appears to indicate that jobs will be protected. However, we need to be careful about how we proceed.

I will support the motion and the Government's amendment. I am not sure whether I can support the Liberal Democrat amendment because I want more information about the cost of the proposed scrappage scheme. We need to know that.

John Swinney: I do not in any way wish to put words into Mr Johnstone's mouth, but should he not be asking where the money for the scheme would come from? That is a fair question to ask the Liberal Democrats, who have lavish spending commitments.

Alex Johnstone: Indeed. I want to know the cost of the scheme because we know that the spending commitments that the Liberal Democrats have made over the past 12 months in the Scottish Parliament alone total well in excess of £10 billion. We must be careful about how we allocate expenditure.

There is another thing that I want to know. In his closing speech, perhaps the cabinet secretary can expand on remarks that he has previously made. How can money that is brought in through such a scheme be used effectively to support companies such as ADL without incurring the wrath of European legislation on how tendering processes are conducted? It is important for us to find ways to support innovative companies such as ADL, but it is essential that we do not make the mistake of simply providing new Government money and opportunities for the bus industry without ensuring that they will deliver the benefits across the board that we want.

Charlie Gordon mentioned the proposal on expanding free bus travel, which Labour came up with before. We have had a whole debate on that but, unfortunately, I still do not have an answer to the question that I asked during that debate. Where will the money to expand the free bus travel scheme come from? I do not even need a specific indication of where there would be a cut. I want to know whether it is the Labour Party's intention to take money from the existing free travel scheme—that is, to change entitlements in

order to create additional money in the scheme—or to put additional money into it from a point outside it. That is a key issue, which will become more relevant if we are to consider how we can use money effectively to support schemes such as the free bus travel scheme.

Finally, we have mentioned before SPT's success with its purchasing policy. There are some things that Charlie Gordon and I do not agree on, but perhaps he and I do agree on the treatment of SPT over the years. It is regrettable and disappointing that it does not have the powers that it once had, which would have allowed it to expand its opportunities in the area that we are discussing.

10:51

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): How many times over the years have we heard about good ideas, products and innovations that have been developed in Scotland but which have not, unfortunately, come to anything or have been taken on and developed by others elsewhere, who have then benefited from them? It is clear that we are discussing a product that has been designed, developed and delivered in Scotland and which can make a difference not only here but elsewhere. It would be a tragedy if we let that go for whatever reason—as a result of neglect, carelessness or wringing our hands because we think that there is nothing that we can do.

Some of the debate is predicated on the question whether there is a need for investment in buses. Alison McInnes was right to talk about the significant investment that many major bus companies in this country are making. I pay tribute to them. I recently met representatives of Arriva in our area, who explained to me exactly what the company has been doing to develop local bus services. We need to recognise the exceptionally difficult climate in which bus operators are operating. Their margins have been cut, and passenger numbers in some areas are down because of the recession and changed employment patterns. If we are going to ensure the survival of those companies and their investment, it is incumbent on us to do something about that.

Despite the investment by good bus companies, too many buses—certainly across Scotland's central belt—still leave a lot to be desired. We have buses that are not fit for purpose and that, frankly, verge on the dangerous, as well as buses that emit noxious gases at an unacceptably high level. Buses are often not just uncomfortable but unreliable. That is the issue that we should address if, as Charlie Gordon described, we are to have a bus industry and a bus service that are not

only fit for purpose but attractive, so that we bring passengers back on to the buses.

Alexander Dennis Ltd produces a cutting-edge product. There is no doubt about the technology and the contribution that it can make. The cabinet secretary was absolutely right to pay tribute not just to the company and its management, but to the workforce for the sacrifices—I use that word advisedly—that it has made. It is a dedicated and skilled workforce that was determined to keep the product and to keep the jobs in the local community. I wonder whether the company would have survived without the sacrifice and commitment of the workforce. I pay tribute to the workers and to their trade union for everything that they have done to give the company an opportunity for the future.

We should ask what we as a Parliament, with our appointed Government ministers, can do to make a difference. John Swinney said that it is a matter for local government. That is correct up to a point, in that it is a matter for local government if that is how we choose to play it. However, it can be a matter for the Parliament and its Government ministers if we and they choose to do something about it.

John Swinney: I hope that Mr Henry will come on to the fact that the Government has made available resources specifically to ensure an uptake of low-carbon buses, through the reconfiguration of the BSOG and through the particular grant that we have made available to Strathclyde partnership for transport.

Hugh Henry: I acknowledge that but, in a sense, it proves my point that the matter is not just one for local government—Government ministers can do something. The question is whether what they have done is sufficient. However, I pay tribute to ministers for what has been done.

One thing that can make a difference is a spend-to-save initiative, which I saw when I was leader of a council. By putting in money up front and encouraging expenditure by various departments, we ensured that they did something more efficiently and effectively and saved money. Some of the measures to which the cabinet secretary referred are in that direction. We can spend to save through Government initiatives that save jobs, reduce running costs and protect our environment.

The question is whether we can unite around not only the motion but the principle of ensuring that Alexander Dennis Ltd and its dedicated workforce have a fighting chance for the future. We should and can do that, for the best.

10:57

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):

No speaker in the debate will have anything but praise for Alexander Dennis Ltd, which is one of the world's leading bus builders. ADL is at the forefront of the manufacture of green buses with reliable hybrid single and double-decker buses that produce fuel efficiency savings of about 30 per cent. The company is to be warmly commended for its work in the sector. Similarly, I am sure that all members will share the concern that workers at ADL have been on a three-day week. A shaky economic climate has meant that, unfortunately, fewer customers have been seeking to invest in fleets. However, with the economy edging towards recovery, I believe that a cutting-edge company such as ADL can soon be going from strength to strength. I am pleased that the company will move back to a five-day working week in April.

Charlie Gordon's motion is well intentioned and there was much to agree with in his speech. However, the first question that is raised by his motion is about the legality of his call for the Scottish Government to fund grants for the acquisition of ADL buses in particular. Is that a call for the Government to hand money to local authorities on the strict condition that they purchase products from a particular local firm? Unfortunately, there is a distinct possibility that that would breach European state aid and procurement laws.

Secondly, surely it must be for the regional transport authorities and local authorities to secure best value in the way that best fits their local circumstances. SPT has made savings by purchasing buses and recovering the cost through savings in payments to bus operators. However, as the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK has pointed out, SPT might well be in a unique situation as regards purchasing, maintaining and storing buses, and other partnerships might not be able to secure best value in that way.

We can support the bus industry in ways that are different from those to which Charlie Gordon referred. If we want to help public transport operators, particularly bus operators, we should consider lobbying the UK Government for a change in vehicle excise duty. The current scheme does not provide anywhere near enough incentive for the use of low-pollution buses, so more work can be done on that.

I welcome the Scottish Government's recent £740 million three-year funding package for the Scottish bus industry. In particular, I welcome the improvements that have been made to the bus service operators grant scheme so that hybrid and low-carbon vehicles, such as those made by ADL, will receive grant at twice the normal rate. I am

also pleased that the Scottish Government has given a grant of £1 million to SPT for the purchase of low-carbon vehicles, although it was not for any specific company.

It would be remiss of me to take part in a debate on public transport without raising the subject of the Edinburgh trams. Lord Foulkes raised the issue in the earlier debate on climate change but, unfortunately, he is not in the chamber now. One wonders how many low-carbon buses could have been bought had every other party in the Parliament voted to spend the money for that scheme—£545 million and rising—on that green technology rather than a tramline that will replicate the most popular bus route in the city. We could have revolutionised Edinburgh's entire public transport system and safeguarded, if not expanded, Scottish manufacturing jobs in the process. We would probably even have had enough money left over to share with Mr Gordon's constituency. Instead, we will get half of a white elephant that is built in Spain, tested in Germany and, most likely, stored in Croydon, because the construction of the depot to store the trams is running two years behind schedule. That is a sad reflection of Labour's transport priorities when they win a vote in Parliament.

11:01

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I, too, am pleased to take part in the debate. As other members have done, I thank the workers at Alexander Dennis Ltd and give them my support. As members have acknowledged, they have worked hard to develop new buses and have made sacrifices in difficult economic circumstances. As someone who is married to an individual who was made redundant when British Leyland's Albion works in Glasgow closed—when the bus industry was last under pressure—I understand the pressure that people will have been under and the worry about their jobs.

Alison McInnes rightly commented that people want decent buses to travel on but, in parts of my constituency and more widely in Ayrshire, people want any kind of bus to travel on. People tell me that it is impossible for them to use public transport because it does not run at the times that they need it to get to work or take up leisure opportunities. That is a problem in rural areas, but not exclusively there, because people in some housing schemes, too, feel isolated in the evenings and at weekends. We have also had problems with timetabling changes, as a result of which buses no longer join up with local rail services or services are not at times when people need them. I make those points to take advantage of the minute of leeway in my speech.

To return to the subject of the debate, the proposal is that we should consider what can be done to make more opportunities available for bus operators to renew and refresh their fleets. We must give that proposal serious consideration. I was recently at a meeting in my area at which there were representatives of a couple of small local bus firms. They feel that there is no incentive for firms, particularly small firms, to refresh their fleets. They recognise, as I do, that some bigger operators have invested in new buses, but they argue that that is difficult for smaller firms because of the tendering process, the length of contracts that are awarded and a range of other issues.

I ask the minister, when he responds to the debate, to answer one point that those firms raised with me. If a group of small operators wished to work co-operatively in the tendering process but to retain their identity as individual companies, would they be able to do that? Would the Scottish Government assist them in developing mechanisms to allow them to do so? Perhaps the minister could look into that further.

School buses have been mentioned. Part of the problem in my area is that the buses on the school run tend to be the oldest ones, which are not used for any other purpose. They are brought out in the morning to do the school run and are not used again until later in the day. Surely it is not too much to expect that our children are carried in up-to-date vehicles. That would set an example to them about what is appropriate for public transport and it would get them into good habits, so that when they do other things, they take public transport, instead of simply relying on being dropped off by car.

I return to the point that small businesses in my area raised with me. When I asked them what would help them and what kind of incentive would enable them to invest in new buses, the person who spoke to me described something that sounded remarkably like the green bus fund that has been developed south of the border. He was not aware of that scheme but, nonetheless, what he described sounded remarkably like it. I simply put that point on the record and invite the minister to respond to it.

My final point is about meeting accessibility criteria. My fear is that, as we approach the deadline for compliance, people will seek to extend it because they have not been able to comply. That will simply not be good enough. We know that the deadline is coming and we know what needs to be done. We need to ensure that everyone can meet the deadline. We have the opportunity: we have a firm and a workforce who are ready and willing to take on the challenge. We need support from every level of government to ensure that that skilled workforce, unlike my

husband, are able to continue to work in this important industry in the future.

11:07

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): I want to focus my remarks on Alexander Dennis Ltd, the UK's biggest bus manufacturing company, which is headquartered in my constituency, where it employs 900 people. It is the biggest manufacturing company in my constituency and, outwith the local authority and NHS Forth Valley, it is probably the biggest employer. Therefore, it plays a very important part in the economy of the Falkirk area.

The recent economic downturn has had a serious impact on the company. In the past year, I think that four or five of the major bus operators in the UK have significantly reduced their capital spend on purchasing buses. Some have gone from an annual capital spend of £50 million to £70 million on buses every single year to a planned capital spend of only £15 million to £20 million. That has had a serious knock-on effect on companies such as Alexander Dennis.

As a number of members have said, the workforce has played its part in trying to address the economic difficulties that the company faces and, for a number of months, has been on a three-day week. The economic downturn has also had a serious impact on Alexander Dennis's supply chain—many of the small and medium-sized companies that supply it with parts and materials. I know that Scottish Enterprise has been working hard with those companies to try to sustain them through the downturn.

Like others have done, I pay a personal tribute to the significant contribution that the workforce at Falkirk has made in going to a three-day week to support the company through the downturn. The move back to a five-day week in April has been realised only because of the significant contribution that the workforce was prepared to make when the company found itself in economic difficulty.

It is also important to recognise that Alexander Dennis has a very good future ahead of it. We should not create the impression that the company is not capable of growing and developing and returning to the level that it was at before the economic downturn. I know that the company is very keen that the idea does not take hold that it is not capable of moving towards a good future.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that, for many years, I have pressed him regularly about providing greater support to the bus industry and the bus manufacturing industry. One of the key issues that Alexander Dennis has often raised with me—I believe that the company raised this with

the cabinet secretary when he visited the factory—is how to create incentives for bus operators to move towards having more environmentally friendly buses. It suggested to me that the BSOG mechanism could be used to create such an incentive. I am particularly pleased that the Government has gone down that route, because the company's view is that it is a more sustainable way of encouraging bus operators to move towards low-carbon and hybrid buses.

I want to focus on hybrid buses in particular. Alexander Dennis is not just a UK or European leader but an international leader in hybrid bus technology. All the independent assessments of hybrid bus technology point to Alexander Dennis being a world leader in that respect. However, one of the challenges that Alexander Dennis has faced is in creating a platform so that bus operators recognise that hybrid buses have serious benefits for them. For some time, the company has been looking for a way to create that platform so that bus operators in Scotland and the rest of the UK can see those practical benefits. Despite the financial benefits of reduced fuel costs to the bus operator, hybrid buses are significantly more expensive than normal, less environmentally friendly buses—they are £100,000 to £150,000 more expensive. It is therefore difficult to get bus operators to buy into making that move unless they can see the practical benefits of it. That is why I welcome the £1 million that has been given to SPT to create the platform that the company has been looking for.

Cathy Jamieson talked about compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The bus operators have a timeframe for single-deck buses to be DDA compliant by 2015 and for double-deck buses to be compliant by 2017. I would not like to see any slippage in that timeframe, because that would undermine the potential benefits for companies such as Alexander Dennis and the wider environmental benefits. I know that that matter is outwith the minister's competence, but I hope that he will take the opportunity to make representations to UK ministers and seek an assurance that they are not looking for further slippage in the timeframe, which would be a retrograde step that would damage companies such as Alexander Dennis in the future.

11:13

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I welcome the chance to speak in this debate about an issue that is important to many of my constituents and to many communities throughout Scotland.

The Labour motion has two key elements: promoting adaptable buses and encouraging the Scottish Government to support companies such

as Alexander Dennis Ltd. I will say a few words about both issues. The motion highlights the work that SPT has done in recent years to secure best value for subsidised bus contracts and to drive up fleet standards. Over the past few years, SPT has taken a range of steps to improve the quality and reliability of bus services in the west of Scotland. Clearly, that has been achieved in the context of a fully deregulated bus market, which is largely determined by the commercial free will of private sector bus operators. Its five-point bus action plan has been adopted by all the constituent local authorities and has the support of the traffic commissioner for Scotland. SPT's bus wardens have worked to ensure that bus operators run services according to published timetables that meet minimum standards and provide adequate information to members of the public. In addition, in recent years SPT has been purchasing buses as a way of reducing the cost of subsidised services and ensuring the highest possible standards in terms of vehicle quality.

As other members said, DDA compliance is important, as are reducing emissions and improving fuel efficiency. Those improvements have led to significantly lower contract costs that have—in turn—enabled SPT to run a greater number of subsidised services. That is increasingly important, given the context of the deregulated market, which is not delivering for people in the west of Scotland. SPT has been left to pick up the pieces.

The first buses of the type that I have described have already paid for themselves through the reduced cost of the subsidised service over the lifetime of the contract. Strathclyde partnership for transport is keen to continue with the approach and it wants to ensure that buses that are purchased are adaptable to a range of uses. As Charlie Gordon said, the model that SPT is following is in line with Sir John Arbuthnott's recommendations. By purchasing smaller buses that have flexible seating configurations, SPT will ensure that buses rarely lie idle in a yard. A typical day for such a bus might see it start with an early-morning subsidised service, followed by a school run and community and local authority work, perhaps in partnership with the National Health Service. In the afternoon, the bus might be used for demand-responsive transport services before it returns to school work and on to evening subsidised services for villages and towns. In that way, the SPT can ensure that a publicly-owned asset, whether it is an SPT bus or one that is owned by a local authority, is fully utilised. I appreciate that other passenger transport executives cannot do things in the same way as SPT, but perhaps they can learn from its example.

As other members have done, I want to say a few words about Alexander Dennis Ltd, which has

a worldwide reputation for constructing buses of the highest quality. Many of my constituents work in its Falkirk factory. It is important that we do everything in our power to support companies such as ADL, particularly in the current economic climate. It is to be hoped that some public money can be used for what should be a win-win scenario for everyone: purchasing high-quality buses to enhance public transport while also protecting valuable local manufacturing jobs is something on which we all have agreed this morning. I am pleased that we can agree on that, but Labour also urges the Government to continue to do all it can—indeed, to do more.

I have no doubt that the deregulated bus industry is not delivering for many of my constituents, particularly those who live in smaller towns, villages and rural communities. My colleague Charlie Gordon was a little too modest in not mentioning his member's bill on the subject. I am disappointed that more members did not support it.

One way or another, we need to have a more regulated bus industry—one that may well deliver profits for operators, but which also delivers services to communities that are becoming increasingly isolated.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We move to wind-up speeches.

11:18

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): There is little doubt that Charlie Gordon's heart is in the right place. Better buses are a laudable aim, but we need to use the head over the heart if we are to implement a reliable and green boost to the bus production economy. Our doing so not only will benefit current bus users but may attract more people to take the bus, rather than the car.

Alison McInnes was using her head when she called, in our amendment, for a statement of support to be made for the whole bus production industry. I hope that Alistair Darling will make such a statement in his budget statement next week. If he and his Labour colleagues are willing to do so, major investment would be made in a bus scrappage scheme that may well mirror the huge success of the car scrappage scheme. It would provide jobs not only in Scotland, but throughout the UK, and it will ensure new and existing passenger benefits from better buses, which is exactly what Charlie Gordon and his colleagues seek.

Members have mentioned the Strathclyde partnership for transport. The help with the purchase of five hybrid buses, as outlined by Mr Swinney, is a very welcome move, but there has to be better co-ordination between SPT and other

areas throughout the country. Alison McInnes referred to SPT's being funded differently, which puts it in a position to afford such purchases—a position in which many areas of the country do not find themselves. Alex Johnstone agreed with, I think, Cathy Jamieson on treatment in that area.

I am surprised that no mention has been made of the community transport benefits of using smaller buses, particularly in our rural areas. Perhaps the cabinet secretary might touch on that in his summing up. Most members rightly spent time in their speeches talking about Alexander Dennis Ltd and welcomed the fact that, in the very near future, the company is moving from a three-day week back to a five-day week. I join members in welcoming that move. As Alison McInnes said, Alexander Dennis Ltd is not only at the forefront of research and development, but producing some of the best goods in the country. Alex Johnstone rightly said that the return to five-day working will protect jobs. Let us hope that the company continues to grow. The local member, Michael Matheson, did well in highlighting the position of the company in his speech.

Many members touched on emissions standards, which is a crucial area for many of us who want to see not only newer buses but greener buses being introduced in the near future. Shirley-Anne Somerville referred to the 30 per cent fuel saving from fuel-efficient buses. That is a reasonable target, although it could go even higher, depending on the quality of the buses that will be produced in the future. Charlie Gordon referred to the global benefits of reducing emissions. He was absolutely right in saying that, and I hope that he and his colleagues will join the Liberal Democrats in doing what we can to persuade colleagues at Westminster to ensure that a bus scrappage scheme is introduced to maximise efficiency and reduce the emissions of buses throughout the country.

Benefits from having such new buses are already being felt throughout the country. I have seen plenty such benefits in my area of west Fife, including low-floor and better quality buses that many more people are now getting to use. Alex Johnstone reasonably asked where the funding for the Liberal Democrat bus scrappage scheme will come from. I say to him and the Parliament that the Liberal Democrats' fully costed green economic package to stimulate the whole UK economy, including job creation, is part of a £3.3 billion redirection of spending.

The Liberal Democrats will support the Labour motion and I hope that Labour will support our amendment in the same constructive manner in which it was lodged. Most important is that I strongly urge Charlie Gordon and his Labour colleagues to get on the phone to Alistair Darling

straight after the debate to urge him to include a bus scrappage scheme in his budget next week.

11:23

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): The debate has been a pretty good one with broad consensus across the chamber. The first area of obvious consensus has been praise for the work of Alexander Dennis Ltd. Every front-bench member stressed that work in their speeches: indeed, pretty much without exception, members have mentioned the company. Michael Matheson's comments captured well the sense of that.

The second area of broad consensus was on the type of buses that ADL and other companies produce. Charlie Gordon referred to the ALX300, which has a host of benefits including that it is DDA compliant and that its seating is flexible in number and configuration, which means that it can be used for demand-responsive transport services, which is an issue on which the Scottish Conservatives focused in our response to the previous Scottish Executive's bus inquiry of a couple of years ago.

There was also broad consensus on the next step in promoting hybrid buses, which have not only all the benefits of the ALX300 but other important environmental benefits that will be key in the future. There is much on which all members can agree.

The last part of Mr Gordon's motion asks for grants to be funded

"as a matter of urgency ... for acquisition of ADL buses by transport authorities and by commercial bus operators".

I ask whoever closes for the Labour Party to address that issue, as there are two broad questions that need to be answered if Labour members are serious about the proposal's being funded

"as a matter of urgency".

The first question concerns the legality of what is requested. Numerous speakers have referred to the issue. The suggestion that central Government money be given to transport authorities and bus operators to purchase from one named supplier asks very serious questions about procurement law and state-aid law in relation to the European Union. Have those who lodged the motion sought a legal view on what they are requesting? If so, I would be interested to know what responses they have received. That is a key question, because if the scheme is not legal it will be kicked into touch.

Secondly, I would be grateful if whoever closes for the Labour Party would provide further particulars on the size of the grants that are sought. What individual grants are Labour members seeking? What is the overall size of the

pot, when the transport authorities and operators to which the motion refers are added together? I am seeking not an exact figure, but a ballpark figure. The cabinet secretary mentioned changes to the bus service operators grant and the £1 million or so that SPT has been given for its procurement process. I got a distinct sense from all the Labour members who have spoken today that they are asking for something in addition to that. It is important to know what is requested and where that money ought to come from.

My colleague Mr Johnstone outlined our position on the motion and the amendments. There is much that has been agreed, and it has been a constructive and useful debate. However, the questions that I have posed need to be answered.

11:27

John Swinney: The comment that found getting currency in today's debate most challenging was Mr Tolson's proposition that the head is ruling the heart in the Liberal Democrats. I am not sure that I normally accept that logic in Liberal Democrat contributions. It is interesting that Mr Tolson was able to marshal a sense of what would be included in the spending that would provide the bus scrappage scheme, but provided scant detail on from where the money would come. I say that bearing in mind that the Liberal Democrats are signed-up supporters of the savage-cut approach to public expenditure. Questions remain about the issues that are at stake.

Cathy Jamieson asked an interesting question about collaborative procurement among smaller operators. She will appreciate that I cannot give her a definitive answer today, but I will certainly examine the suggestion, which would help us to address the question how smaller operators can contribute to improving fuel efficiency in the bus fleet.

In her speech, Cathy Jamieson acknowledged and answered some of Mr Brown's questions about the procurement methodology. I will try to be helpful to Mr Brown. The Government has provided £1 million of funding to enable Strathclyde partnership for transport to purchase up to five hybrid buses. There has had to be a full and open procurement process in order to ensure that the purchase is compliant with procurement legislation. The question about the last part of the Labour motion is entirely fair. It is important that we do not mislead members of the public into thinking that we can ignore procurement legislation when we spend public money in this fashion. The tender process for the Government contract is well under way, and Alexander Dennis is one of the companies that is involved. In that process, it will be able to deploy the approach and

the technology that it has developed so effectively at its plant in Falkirk.

That brings me to another distinguished contribution—that of Mr Matheson, who has a constituency interest in Alexander Dennis. He was right to say that he has persistently pressed ministers to do all that we can to ensure that there is enough incentive in the bus service operators grant system to enable different operators to make a greater contribution to the purchase of low-emissions buses. Mr Matheson and others have accepted positively the changes that we have made. I hope that, after the scheme is implemented on 1 April, we will see greater participation in the process.

Mr Henry was correct to highlight the danger of letting good ideas out of our grip. That is an important issue. As part of the work that it does to support business, the Government tries to encourage not only the development and retention of our manufacturing technology here in Scotland but its promotion, from that base, to an international audience. The focus of Scottish Development International is on internationalising access to the bus technology that Alexander Dennis has developed, which is a tribute to the Scottish manufacturing tradition.

Perhaps the only discordant note in the debate was sounded—uncharacteristically—by my colleague Shirley-Anne Somerville, who ventured to ask how many low-carbon buses could have been purchased for £545 million. The answer is, "One heck of a lot." There are always choices to be made in public expenditure. The Government did not want to choose to spend £500 million of Scottish taxpayers' money and £45 million of Edinburgh local authority revenue on the tram project. We could have made a greater impact in respect of low-carbon vehicles if back in 2007 Mr McNeil and all his chums—Mr Tolson, Ms McInnes and their friends and, I am afraid to say, Mr Johnstone and Mr Brown—had not given parliamentary consent to the Edinburgh tram scheme.

It is incumbent on those who have voted for rather expensive public transport projects to think twice before asking the Government to spend even more money on additional schemes, without telling us where the money will come from, when the Government is doing all that it can, through the investment that it has made in low-emissions vehicles and the reconfiguration of the bus service operators grant, to support the continuation of the excellent manufacturing tradition that is encompassed by Alexander Dennis at Falkirk.

11:32

John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This morning, much has been said about the work that the workforce and unions—Unite and the GMB—at Alexander Dennis have done in partnership with the company to give it a fighting chance of having a future. I add my support to those comments. It is not easy for a convener, a full-time official or a shop steward to speak to their members about taking difficult decisions that may not have the desired impact. I am pleased that it looks likely, because of the effort that the workforce has put in—not forgetting that some people have lost their jobs along the way—that the company will have some sort of future and, it is hoped, will return to a five-day week in the near future.

However, we cannot be complacent about the situation, which is our main reason for seeking this morning's debate. We want to ensure that, at Parliament and public levels, people are aware of the effort that the company, the employees and the unions have put in in getting themselves to the current position, and of the fact that Alexander Dennis has a potential future. That future can be supported by MSPs, hopefully on a cross-party basis, at five o'clock, but also by the Scottish Government and local authorities in the decisions that they take day to day.

John Swinney was right to acknowledge the role of the company and the unions and to highlight the fact that Alexander Dennis is moving back to a five-day week. I was pleased that the cabinet secretary took time to pay tribute to the workforce for the work that it has done.

However, it is not just about supporting in principle what could happen at local government level or what could be decided by the Scottish Government; Labour members want an active approach, in which Government goes out and says to local government and people who have an interest in taking on bus-building contracts, "Here are the things we can do, and this is the approach that the Scottish Government wants contractors and local government to take." That has happened at UK level. Such an approach informed the thinking behind the £30 million green bus fund. The green bus fund is not only an important pot of money but a brand that is out there and is being sold as a concept, in an attempt to capture the imagination of bus manufacturers, bus operators and local authorities throughout the UK, and to show them how they can work together to deliver not just greener buses and better services, but manufacturing opportunities.

Gavin Brown asked for a ballpark figure. We welcome the £1 million that has been provided to SPT, which will help the organisation in the contractual process that it will go through. We hope that Alexander Dennis, too, will benefit from

that in some way. However, in the context of the green bus fund, a comparable consequential spend in Scotland would probably be about £3 million. That is the ballpark that we are in.

Alison McInnes made excellent points about the integration of services, as did Cathy Jamieson. The way forward is to use much more effectively the school and social work buses that are empty for part of the day or that run only at certain times. It is frustrating to see schoolchildren being picked up at 8.30 am by the oldest bus in the fleet, which has smoke belching out of the back. Anything that can be done to improve integration must be welcome.

Alison McInnes laid out some of the detail of a bus scrappage scheme. It will be interesting to watch what Liberal Democrats do at UK level to push forward the idea. I have not phoned Alistair Darling yet, because we are not allowed to use our phones in the chamber, but I will text him when I get out of the chamber, to see whether he is around.

I offer a word of caution about points that Alex Johnstone made. Many parties are concerned about what has happened to the manufacturing sector in the UK—and in many other developed countries—during the past few years. We need to talk up manufacturing opportunities, as Michael Matheson said, and we must consider how Government spend in Scotland can support such opportunities.

That brings me to procurement. The motion considers how Scottish Government and local government spend can support the bus manufacturing sector in Scotland, but we acknowledge that there are legal hurdles and that a procurement process must be followed. However, there are things that we can do, for example by using community benefit clauses and other contractual obligations, to start to push at the boundaries of the procurement process. We must do that, because the public want to know how far the money that is spent in Scotland reaches into the communities and workplaces in which they live and are employed. People will start to ask more regularly what is delivered for the money that is spent. Labour members will work with the Scottish Government and with other parties to identify a way of pushing out the boundaries of the procurement process.

Hugh Henry talked about the need for an active approach from Government. We need the industrial activism that involves approaches to employers and consideration of the procurement opportunities that will come up in Scotland during the next few years. Government must try to work hand in hand with employers to ensure that Scottish people and Scottish workers benefit from contracts. We must ensure that that happens as

public spending contracts during the coming period.

Cathy Jamieson and Karen Whitefield made excellent points about the support for Charlie Gordon's proposal for a regulation of bus services bill. I am disappointed that the proposal did not attract sufficient support in the Scottish Parliament. I think that most members, regardless of their views on bus regulation, agree that we need a national debate about the level and appropriateness of services in our communities. I am sure that such a proposal will be made again at some point.

Points about the supply chain were well made by Michael Matheson, who identified a concern for all manufacturing companies.

We reassure Alexander Dennis and its workforce that the debate is about not just highlighting their problems but ensuring that they have a future. The Scottish Parliament wants to get behind them and give them all the support that they need. The workforce and the company deserve that.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Stones (Recycling)

1. Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to recycle unused stones located on rural land for construction projects. (S3O-9957)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Decisions on the suitability for reuse of unused stones on rural land are best taken at a local level. Not all unused stones are suitable for construction.

Maureen Watt: Unused large stones are a common feature of many fields and could provide a cheaper, more environmentally friendly alternative to disruptive quarrying practices. Will the minister undertake, along with local authority officials and construction companies, to examine ways of encouraging the use of such stones in construction projects, which would reduce carbon emissions and damage to the environment?

Stewart Stevenson: The member makes an interesting point. Like many people in Scotland, I live in a house in a steading in a rural setting, which makes use of stones that were found around the farm when the steading was converted. That is a traditional approach to building, which commends itself in many instances.

Local authorities could impose planning conditions on the design of buildings in the countryside, to ensure that we use such stones, which people have been digging out of arable land throughout the world for some 8,000 years.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Mr McLetchie is not present to ask question 2. That is regrettable. As I have said before in the chamber, if a member does not turn up to ask their question, supplementary questions are ruled out. Also, question 2 has brought the Deputy First Minister, who will not have to answer another question during general questions, to the chamber. That is highly regrettable.

Public Sector Efficiency Savings

3. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what percentage of efficiency savings made by the public sector in 2008-09 is attributed to the sale of surplus assets and underspends due to staff vacancies. (S3O-9885)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Public bodies reported savings made through improved asset management of £82 million in 2008-09, which represents 9.8 per cent of the £839 million total. The figure is not restricted to asset sales, but will include savings that were generated through better use of assets, such as energy efficiency measures, generating income from assets or better fleet management. Public bodies were not asked to report savings due to staff vacancies.

Cathie Craigie: In his 2006 report, "The Efficient Government Initiative: a progress report", the Auditor General for Scotland recommended that the Government ensure that

"all reported efficiency savings are calculated using suitably robust methodologies".

In his report, "Improving public sector efficiency", which was published in February 2010, the Auditor General noted that the Scottish Government

"does not validate reported savings",

and he went on to say:

"There is a risk that public bodies are reporting efficiency savings which are actually cuts in service as they have adversely affected the quality or level of service provided."

Is the cabinet secretary concerned about that? What is he doing to address the matters that the Auditor General raised in his report?

John Swinney: In the Audit Scotland report, the scale of the achievement of Scottish public bodies is acknowledged. I have said this before in the Parliament, but it is important to remember that in 2008-09 the efficiency savings programme realised savings of £839 million, which exceeded the target of £534 million by more than half. The analysis of performance that Audit Scotland has provided is welcome, and the whole process of efficiency achievement is a central part of managing the challenge in relation to public expenditure that we will face in the years to come.

Of course, the Government will look at Audit Scotland's report. However, I point out that Audit Scotland is positive about the achievements that have been made and the mechanism that the Government has deployed to ensure that we deliver the efficiency savings programme that the taxpayers of Scotland expect us to deliver.

Teacher Numbers (Reductions)

4. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is committed to reversing the reductions in teacher numbers that have taken place since May 2007. (S3O-9882)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):

Employment of teachers is primarily a matter for local authorities. However, the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that Scotland has the right number of teachers to meet the needs of our pupils. That is a logical step that I am sure would appeal to all in these straitened times.

Rhona Brankin: So, if the Scottish Government remains committed to maintaining teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls, as it promised in 2007, why do the public sector employment in Scotland statistics that were published yesterday show a further year-on-year fall in teacher numbers of 600? If it is up to local councils to make good on the Scottish National Party's manifesto promises, what message does the cabinet secretary have for the 11 out of 13 SNP-run councils that have cut teacher numbers since the SNP gained power at Holyrood?

Michael Russell: My initial message is not to believe Labour press releases. Even the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities delivered a statement yesterday that chided Mr McNulty for the way in which he had presented something in his press release. The reality is that the biggest fall in teacher numbers in the 2009 teacher census came from Glasgow City Council, which accounted for 28 per cent of the 1,348 lost teaching posts.

What the member needs to look at—this is where reality should kick in—is that the cost to local authorities of employing 2,000 more teachers would be roughly £80 million per annum. If the member is committing herself to the wrong number of teachers for our schools at this stage, it will cost her another £80 million, which is yet another spending pledge at a time when not one member of the public believes a word that Labour says about this.

Rural Petrol Stations (Closures)

5. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how many petrol stations in rural areas have closed in the past 10 years. (S3O-9870)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I answered a similar question—S3W-27817—on 28 October 2009 with an extract from the interdepartmental business register, which is maintained by the Office for National Statistics. Although the figures do not provide a precise answer to the question asked, the latest statistics suggest that there may have been a reduction in the number of rural petrol stations over a 10-year period of about one third.

Murdo Fraser: The minister may be aware of the serious situation that is faced by filling stations

with attached retail premises, some of which have just seen increases of 50 per cent or more in their rateable values that may well threaten their viability. Does the minister agree that we cannot afford more closures of petrol stations in rural areas? If so, can he tell us what action the Scottish Government will take to try to address this serious situation?

Stewart Stevenson: There are two parts to my answer. First, we congratulate many of the rural filling stations as they diversify into other business areas, meeting local needs and, as they broaden their potential income base, giving greater long-term security. Following representations from the industry, the independent Scottish assessors are reviewing the methods used for the valuation of petrol stations.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Prices at many petrol stations in the Highlands are at very high levels right now. Besides hitting customers, those prices may well bring closure nearer to the petrol stations in view of cheaper fuel being available at centrally based supermarkets and areas further south in Scotland. Has the minister had any discussions with HM Treasury with regard to possible changes to the taxation regime that might assist motorists, petrol stations and the local economies of remote and economically fragile areas of Scotland? If he has not had such discussions, will he consider approaching the Treasury as soon as is practically possible?

Stewart Stevenson: I suspect that there are few subjects on which we have had more correspondence with the Treasury. In particular, we have drawn its attention to the experience in Corsica—I think that I am correct in saying this—where the European Union has agreed that prices may be supported in a way that ensures that rural and remote areas such as Corsica can have prices that meet local needs. We absolutely commend that approach as one that is appropriate to Scotland. We need support from the Treasury on it, which we have so far not had.

Forth Replacement Crossing (Procurement)

6. John Park (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide an update on the procurement processes for the Forth replacement crossing. (S3O-9912)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): We remain on track, subject to parliamentary approval, to award the principal contract in spring 2011 and complete the project by 2016.

John Park: Like me, I am sure that the cabinet secretary hopes that the replacement Forth crossing will be a legacy, in terms of not just

infrastructure, but employment and training. Is he in a position to give a cast-iron guarantee that community benefit clauses will be part of the procurement process for the future Forth crossing, which will hopefully provide wider benefits in terms of training and apprenticeship opportunities for local people, and opportunities for supply-chain companies to benefit as well?

John Swinney: The question of community benefit clauses is very important. I certainly would want to give Mr Park the assurance that that will be a central part of what the Government takes forward as part of the procurement exercise on the Forth replacement crossing. Community benefit clauses, of course, exist in one of the other major procurement projects in which the Deputy First Minister has been involved, for the Southern general hospital in Glasgow.

Mr Park's other point, which is equally important, is about the importance of ensuring that there is a long-term, beneficial impact on employment patterns within the area. Certainly, as we have been able to achieve in a range of different infrastructure contracts around the country, we would be looking for new opportunities for apprenticeships to be achieved as part of the procurement activity that is under way. That certainly will be uppermost in the mind of the Government as part of the procurement process for the Forth replacement crossing.

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): During my recent conversations with the business community in Fife, including the Federation of Small Businesses, the issue of awarding Government contracts to small and medium-sized businesses was raised. Such businesses are aware of the restrictions on the public procurement process, but they seek fair consideration when contracts are being awarded for large construction projects. Will the minister encourage main contractors to consider using local suppliers to help Scotland's small and medium-sized businesses to survive and grow, as well as to reduce the carbon footprint of the construction projects?

John Swinney: I have a great deal of sympathy with the point that Mr Tolson has raised. Indeed, in its approach to procurement, the Government has tried to increase the opportunities and avenues for small companies to be able to tender for public sector contract activity. One of the most effective ways in which we have done that is through the establishment of public contract Scotland, which is a web-portal system that enables local suppliers to register their interest in whatever speciality or trade skill they are involved in, whether it is construction, joinery or whatever. Government contracts are advertised in an easy-to-access

portal, so there is an increased opportunity for small companies to access that contract base.

Mr Tolson was a participant in the debate that we have just had on bus services, and I think that he will accept that there are elements of procurement legislation that we must observe to ensure that the procurement process is fair and open. However, I believe that public contract Scotland increases the opportunities that are available for smaller companies to obtain that form of business.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The cabinet secretary is well aware of the unsuccessful bidder premium of up to £5 million that will go to the losing bidder. Does he share my view that that must count as the oxymoron of the day and that it is a case of the taxpayer subsidising failure?

John Swinney: Such matters are always a judgment. Clearly, any party that is involved in the tendering process for this very big contract will incur significant expenditure. The judgment that ministers must weigh up is whether it is appropriate to put in place a payment of that sort to encourage broader competition for the particular tender. It is therefore a matter of judgment, but I appreciate Mr Stewart's sentiment. However, if as a result of not providing the £5 million payment, we did not have an open competition and, in fact, had only a single tender, I am not sure that the taxpayer would be best served in that case any more than they would by the approach that Mr Stewart has set out in the concerns that he has expressed to Parliament today.

Oil and Gas Extraction

7. Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Department of Energy and Climate Change about future extraction of oil and gas in Scotland. (S3O-9935)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): Through my co-chairing of the PILOT initiative, which brings together Governments, industry and other stakeholders to discuss issues relating to the oil and gas sector, we have regular dialogue with the UK Government on a range of issues, including production. As part of the current refreshing of PILOT targets, we look forward to continued dialogue with the UK Government to ensure that we achieve the best possible output from the Scottish waters.

Although the North Sea is a mature oil and gas province, substantial reserves remain. According to the recent 2010 Oil and Gas UK activity survey, there are up to 25 billion barrels of oil equivalent still to be recovered from the North Sea. The vast

majority of those reserves lie within Scottish waters.

Aileen Campbell: Is the minister aware of recent comments by emeritus professor of international energy studies at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, Peter Odell, who said that the UK Government should follow Norway's example by setting up a hydrocarbons authority that would ensure that public interest is paramount in exploiting future offshore oil and gas production? Does he agree that the best way to ensure that Scotland maximises the potential of our natural resources is for us to follow Norway's example and have all the powers of a normal independent country?

Jim Mather: I am very much aware of Peter Odell's comments and in general agree with the concept that greater involvement of authorities is necessary to ensure maximum benefit from the remaining reserves. With a pension fund that is currently valued at more than £270 billion, Norway is a good example of where we can be.

We continue to make the case for Scotland to receive greater direct benefits from oil and gas production. On 30 July 2009, the Scottish Government published "An Oil Fund for Scotland: Taking forward Our National Conversation", which set out the case for transferring a share of the wealth generated from oil and gas production to a fund for long-term investment purposes. In addition, in November 2009 we published our national conversation paper on energy, which set out the benefits to Scotland of acquiring greater powers over a range of energy matters, including oil and gas. We continue to make representations on that matter.

Planning (Agricultural Land)

8. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what importance in the planning system is given to using prime agricultural land for development. (S3O-9876)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): It is Scottish planning policy that development on prime agricultural land should not be permitted unless it is an essential part of the settlement strategy or is to meet an established need where no other site is available.

Mary Scanlon: Two recent housing developments on prime agricultural land in the Highlands have been approved—Ness Gap at Fortrose on the Black Isle is grade 1 agricultural land, which I understand is very limited in the Highlands, and the Tornagrain development on the A96 is also prime agricultural land, used previously to grow cereals. Given that food

security and self-sustainability remain important issues to future food production in Scotland, will the minister consider re-examining planning policies to ensure that our best agricultural land is safeguarded for agricultural use?

Stewart Stevenson: It is clear that I cannot comment on specific planning applications because of potential involvement for ministers as a whole. However, we have recently published the consolidated Scottish planning policy, in which we take a stronger line on such developments than was set out previously. We are also developing a land-use strategy this year as part of our responsibilities under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and I am sure that matters such as the one raised by the member will be taken account of.

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): Will development on prime agricultural land, or indeed on brownfield sites, still be subject to local negotiation of planning gain, or was *The Herald* correct this week to report that planning gain was to be abolished?

Stewart Stevenson: *The Herald* was entirely mistaken in suggesting that it is our intention to abolish planning gain. I wrote to *The Herald* immediately after the publication of its article to make matters plain. It is clear that the system would benefit from a review of the processes, but where developers are making significant impacts in communities and on the transport network, it is important that they step up to the plate to make their contribution to addressing those problems with their money.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S3F-2280)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland. Later today I will announce an extra bank holiday in Scotland on 5 June 2012 to mark the Queen's diamond jubilee celebrations. The people of Scotland have a special affection for Her Majesty the Queen and I am sure that the chamber will welcome the opportunity to join in the celebrations being planned to mark Her Majesty's diamond jubilee.

Iain Gray: While we are on celebrations, yesterday saw 20,000 new apprenticeship places achieved. Labour fought hard to get those apprenticeship places in the budget and we are delighted to see 20,000 youngsters getting that start in life. However, Michael Levack of the Scottish Building Federation says that the number of apprentices in training is about to drop by half. Will the First Minister promise us that he will not let that happen?

The First Minister: I am delighted that Iain Gray is jointly celebrating the hugely substantial achievement of 19,991 modern apprenticeships having started in this financial year. That exceeds the target of 18,500 and the year is not over, so I suspect that we will get beyond the 20,000 mark. However, I have to say that I am somewhat puzzled. My memory is that Labour voted against the budget last year and then this year voted against it again, when even more apprenticeship places were proposed. Be that as it may, I am confident about the uptake of the apprenticeship positions. Iain Gray will remember that, to enable us to do even more, in January an additional £4 million was allocated to a new scheme: the apprenticeships grant scheme. That scheme opened on 11 January and was fully subscribed by 4 February, giving 4,000 additional apprenticeship places. That is very recent information, which suggests to me and, I hope, the chamber that these incentives to giving our young people a chance in society are working and will continue to work.

Iain Gray: Not for the first time, the First Minister's memory lets him down. We voted against the budget for this year because it did not have these apprenticeship places in it. When the Government put the apprenticeship places in, we voted for it. The truth is that if it had not been for

us, these apprenticeship places would not have been in the budget.

There was good news for Britain as a whole yesterday, when unemployment went down by 33,000, but it was bad news for Scotland, where unemployment went up by 16,000. Scotland is going backwards under Alex Salmond. What is his excuse?

The First Minister: If I can first correct Iain Gray's memory, Labour voted against the budget despite the apprenticeship places being on offer—given Mr Swinney's constructive proposals. Then, when it realised the great mistake that it had made and that it had defeated the budget by accident, it scrambled to try to redo the thing the following week. It was not Mr Gray's outstanding moment in parliamentary politics.

It is vital that we continue to support the apprenticeship schemes, because they make a huge difference to the lives of young people. Yesterday, I met a youngster called Ryan McDonald, from Tranent, which makes him one of Iain Gray's own constituents—indeed, it makes him a constituent of Anne Moffat, if I am allowed to mention that name in Iain Gray's company. Ryan McDonald was made redundant last year. He then went to college and, just before Christmas, under the adopt an apprentice scheme, the Edinburgh Construction Group was able to continue his apprenticeship. That shows in real and human terms the effectiveness of the schemes that the entire Parliament adopted.

As far as the economic situation that we face is concerned, there is recovery in the Scottish economy, but it is extremely fragile. Therefore, is it not time for us to unite as a Parliament to demand that there be no cuts in public spending in Scotland next year, to demand the accelerated capital spending that Iain Gray supported in the pre-budget report—before he was snubbed by Alistair Darling—and to demand a reflationary package to tackle recession? It is vital that recovery is not choked off by a lack of public investment.

Iain Gray: There is a recovery in Britain, where unemployment is falling, but across all four key employment measures, Scotland is underperforming in comparison with the United Kingdom as a whole. Economic output in Scotland is falling faster than it is in the UK as a whole—that has not happened since world war two. Two thirds of all the jobs that have been lost in the whole of the UK over the past few months have been lost right here in Scotland. Something is going wrong.

The First Minister takes the credit for the number of apprentices. Will he take the responsibility for unemployment going up in

Scotland while it goes down in the country as a whole?

The First Minister: Let us just remember that it is a point of fact that unemployment in Scotland is lower than the UK average, as it has been in every month of this Administration. Iain Gray asks about taking responsibility, but I have been doing a little bit of research. Unemployment is lower in Scotland than it is in the UK as a whole, employment is higher in Scotland than it is in the UK as a whole and economic activity rates are higher in Scotland than they are in the UK as a whole.

However, that was not always the case. Just a few years ago, in 2002-03, Iain Gray was the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning. In every month of his term of office—which, admittedly, was limited—unemployment in Scotland was higher, not lower, than it was in the UK. Did Iain Gray accept responsibility for that, or does he want to give us the credit for having lower unemployment than the UK and, indeed, most of western Europe and America? Does he accept that we should be looking at next year's budget and asking why the UK is the only major economy that has no stimulus package planned for next year? Does he accept that we should unite as a Parliament to ensure that Westminster does not choke off the Scottish recovery?

Iain Gray: When I was enterprise minister, Scotland had the highest employment rate in Europe. Scotland's employment rate may still be marginally higher than the UK's, but the figures for this month and last month show that the UK is catching up on us, and fast.

Our potential is huge. Scotland should be leading, not lagging. What has happened? What has happened is the Salmond slump. He talks about fiscal stimulus, but he is the one who cancelled rail links in Edinburgh and Glasgow, cancelling thousands of jobs. His Scottish Futures Trust has built nothing and has destroyed 30,000 jobs. His housing budget cuts will cost even more construction jobs. He got rid of 1,000 assistants from our classrooms. This week, another 600 teaching jobs have gone—almost 3,000 teachers are on the dole.

Alex Salmond never tires of telling us that facts are chieftains that winna ding. The fact is that Scotland is going backwards under him. Does he have any ideas or does he just have more excuses?

The First Minister: Let me repeat: in every single year of this Administration, unemployment in Scotland has been lower than the UK average.

I remind Iain Gray of what he seems to have forgotten because, unfortunately for him, I have brought the figures along with me. In every single

month from May 2002 to May 2003, when he was Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, International Labour Organization unemployment rates in Scotland were higher than the UK average. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

The First Minister: Iain Gray claims that Scottish unemployment is higher than elsewhere in Europe. In the ILO figures, Scottish unemployment is 7.6 per cent, the European average is 9 per cent, the UK average is 7.8 per cent and the American figure is 10 per cent. Although 7.6 per cent is far too high, does Iain Gray really not know that there is an international recession—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: —that the UK economy led the world into and that the UK economy is now lagging behind the rest of the world in recovery? The reason for that is that in the UK, alone among all the developed economies, the Chancellor of the Exchequer plans no fiscal stimulus for next year. In the same way, he cut the Scottish budget by £500 million.

The construction industry in Scotland ain't suffering from public sector contracts being lost; it is suffering from the private sector recession that has been induced by the Brown bust and the Darling downturn. Sooner rather than later, Iain Gray, as the Labour leader in the Scottish Parliament, will have to accept responsibility for the economic decisions made by Westminster. That is why we should unite as a Parliament to demand a budget that expands the Scottish economy as opposed to one that chokes off Scottish recovery.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-2281)

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

Annabel Goldie: Presiding Officer,

"Members of Parliament have to do their best for their constituents. They should do it without fear or favour".—*[Official Report, 11 February 2010; c 23793.]*

Those fine words were uttered by the First Minister in this Parliament just last month. Last week, the business of this Parliament was disrupted by strike action that resulted in the cancellation of committee business, and another strike is planned for next Wednesday, when the Parliament will sit to debate Scottish Government business. Does the First Minister agree that if MSPs are to do their

duty and act "without fear or favour" in this Parliament they should cross any picket line outside the Parliament and get on with what we have been elected and are paid to do?

The First Minister: As Annabel Goldie should know, I am not responsible for the business of the Parliament. However, the business of Government will continue next week, and I will discharge the business of Government as it is my responsibility to do.

Annabel Goldie should remember that the Scottish Government is not a party in the Public and Commercial Services Union dispute; its dispute is with the United Kingdom Government over redundancy payments and agreements. At the moment, this Government has a no compulsory redundancy policy in operation.

As for giving advice to other MSPs, I accept that when our own staff are involved people will want to behave sensitively. That is presumably why Margaret Mitchell, convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee, and Bill Aitken, convener of the Justice Committee, decided not to have their meetings a week past Tuesday.

Annabel Goldie: No one disputes that trade union members have the right to engage in lawful strike action. However, MSPs who are elected and paid for by the public have a primary and absolute duty to represent the interests of all their constituents in this Parliament, and from that we must not be diverted. It will be business as usual for my party if the strike proceeds. Will the First Minister confirm that he will instruct his ministers and MSPs—all of them—to cross the picket line and come to work?

The First Minister: As I said in my first answer, the business of Government will be discharged. That is my responsibility, as it was a week past Tuesday when business was indeed discharged.

I have to say, though, that I am totally puzzled by the direction of Annabel Goldie's question. She is now asking me to give advice to MSPs that she was quite clearly unwilling to give to Margaret Mitchell and Bill Aitken, who are committee conveners. Does she not see something of an ambivalence in her position, as her own chairmen of parliamentary committees decided not to hold their meetings? Did they not speak to Annabel Goldie beforehand? Was it something that they did of their own volition? Before Labour members wonder whether it is just Tory ambivalence to which I refer, I noted in the papers that John Park crossed the picket line to go to the Parliamentary Bureau's meeting. No doubt John Park felt that he had to behave in a sensitive manner, but needed to discharge the business of the bureau.

I believe that the business of Government has to be discharged and that it will be discharged. I

would not criticise MSPs for behaving sensitively towards staff. However, if we want to get the dispute settled, we could do with a little less humbug and politicking and a bit more common sense.

The Presiding Officer: To save Mr Park's blushes, it was Paul Martin who attended the Parliamentary Bureau.

Members: Oh!

The Presiding Officer: Order—and I am sorry if I have caused Paul Martin any blushes.

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-2282)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I gladly apologise to John Park—and to Paul Martin—for highlighting the difficulty that he may or may not have with his fellow MSPs.

The next meeting of the Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Tavish Scott: On the economy and Scottish jobs, the First Minister probably finds it as ridiculous as I do that Labour can gloat that one part of the United Kingdom is doing better than another, when the whole of the UK is doing worse than the whole of the rest of Europe—except Greece.

The Prime Minister said in the House of Commons yesterday that unemployment is falling, whereas it has gone up by 16,000 in Scotland. What explanation does the First Minister have for the continuing rise in the number of Scots out of work?

The First Minister: I do not say this to mitigate in any way the 7.6 per cent International Labour Organization figure, but in February we had our first reduction in the claimant count in Scotland for two years. We should mention that, as it is an indication that the labour market is turning. It was an incredibly small reduction, however—it is a faltering and very sensitive recovery.

Like Tavish Scott, I believe that those who are responsible for economic policy in the United Kingdom should take responsibility not just for the Brown boom but for the Brown bust. That is obvious. With the UK budget happening next week, surely the Parliament should be uniting right now to ensure that there is fiscal stimulus in the United Kingdom economy next year and that there are no cuts to next year's Scottish budget—which we have already voted on—at either national or local level. If we do not get assurances on that—if those things are not done—that sensitive, faltering recovery will be in danger of being choked off

before it can accelerate into a true, sustained recovery.

Tavish Scott: Unlike the rest of us, Mr Salmond will be able to attend the presentation of the budget in Westminster next week, and it will be interesting to see whether he does.

There are 67,000 more people out of work in Scotland this year than there were last year. Unemployment here has increased twice as fast as in the rest of the UK. Scottish retail had its worst month for more than 10 years. Yesterday's Scottish construction monitor shows that more builders expect to cut staff than expect to recruit them. People do not understand the fact that ministers hailed a recovery in December, nor the fact that the First Minister told me in January that he had "a degree of satisfaction". He has said again this afternoon that there is recovery.

The First Minister invariably mentions his economic recovery plan, which was described by Mackay Consultants just this month as

"a mixture of pseudo-academic jargon and a long term wish list".

Does the First Minister have anything else to offer? When does he think unemployment in Scotland will stop going up?

The First Minister: In February, the claimant count went down for the first time in two years—that is a fact. As I have said before, the recovery in Scotland is sensitive—it is not a strong recovery. The economy is on the turn, as we know from the indications, from expectations surveys and from the purchasing managers index. However, that does not necessarily mean that the economy can withstand cuts in public spending next year. That is why Tavish Scott is on extremely loose ground. The Liberal Democrats, by their own admission, were previously suggesting savage cuts in public spending. At their conference last week, we found out that that policy is no longer operational and that the Liberal Democrats are in fact going to expand public spending.

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): What has this got to do with the question?

The First Minister: In a speech this week, Nick Clegg talked about reducing public spending by £60 billion, which would mean a £6 billion or so reduction in Scottish public spending.

The relevance of that—which Mike Rumbles does not seem to realise—is pretty obvious. How can we have a recovery in the Scottish economy when some parties, such as the Tories, are suggesting that we should rip up next year's budget and reduce it, other parties, such as the Labour Party, will not accept their responsibility for the mess that we are in at the present moment

and other parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, simultaneously call for increases in public spending across a range of subjects while their party leader is plotting the most massive reduction in public spending of any London-based party?

Tavish Scott: The First Minister's letter to my colleague Vince Cable states:

"The public sector must now prepare for several years of fiscal austerity".

Those are the First Minister's own words. Would the First Minister like to lay out what that fiscal austerity will be?

The First Minister: I was rather pleased with the letter from Vince Cable, because it told me that he was not planning to cut public spending in Scotland next year. However, in a speech to the Institute for Public Policy Research this week, Nick Clegg reversed that and outlined savage cuts in public spending.

Tavish Scott asked me what I would cut in public spending. I would cut £5 billion from the identity cards budget and £100 billion for the unnecessary Trident missiles system. If we can agree on that, perhaps we can obviate the desire of the Liberal Democrats to make savage cuts in the Scottish budget while they simultaneously call for increased expenditure on individual items of public spending in Scotland.

Youth Commission on Alcohol (Report)

4. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the report produced by the youth commission on alcohol. (S3F-2288)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I fully agree with Michael Matheson on the need to recognise that young people have an important role in finding solutions to the problems of alcohol misuse. As such, the Minister for Public Health and Sport asked Young Scot to establish the youth commission on alcohol at the end of 2008.

We welcome the youth commission's approach and the energy and enthusiasm that it has brought to the wider alcohol debate—unlike the Opposition parties in the Parliament. We will give the youth commission's report careful consideration and we encourage the rest of the Parliament to do so as well. The Minister for Public Health and Sport has stated that she will write to each of the commissioners by the summer to set out the Scottish Government's response.

Michael Matheson: The commission's report makes some 38 recommendations, a number of which focus on providing leisure activities for young people to offer a genuine alternative to drinking. Does the First Minister agree that providing diversionary activities for Scotland's

young people has a vital part to play in challenging our binge-drinking culture? Will he inform the Parliament what action the Scottish Government is taking on that?

The First Minister: I very much agree that diversionary activities have a significant role to play. Since June 2007, as members will know, there has been a £13 million investment in the cashback for communities scheme. Five organisations in the Falkirk area received funding of just under £22,000 in the most recent round of cashback for communities awards that were announced in December last year. Those organisations range from the boys brigade to the youth learning support that is provided by Falkirk Council. Through cashback and other resources, more than £14,000 is being spent by the Scottish Football Association to develop football in the Falkirk area. Those are some examples of how the cashback for communities scheme is providing valuable alternatives in Michael Matheson's constituency. Those are certainly diversionary activities, but they are also very useful activities in their own right that are being funded by that initiative.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The youth commission on alcohol's excellent report was discussed at yesterday's meeting of the cross-party group on drugs and alcohol, where it emerged that the central theme is that young people want a culture change in relation to drinking in Scotland. Will the First Minister pledge his Government to ensure that at least two young persons are represented on every local licensing forum? Will he also ensure, as requested by the youth commission, that his Cabinet Secretary for Justice has discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland about ensuring full and rigorous enforcement of the current legislation?

The First Minister: I am perfectly happy to take on board those two aspects. On the second question, I will most certainly do that. On the first question, we will give consideration to that point and to all the points that the young people have made.

In that spirit, I hope that Richard Simpson will now have an epiphany on the need for minimum pricing. Like me, he will have seen Labour MP after Labour MP call for minimum pricing in England, where there is less of a problem, while Labour MSP after Labour MSP refuses to accept the reality of their party's role in our approach to rebalancing our relationship with alcohol in Scotland.

Furthermore, I know that Richard Simpson will join me in acknowledging the belated but nonetheless welcome correction from Whyte & Mackay about the impact on jobs in the whisky

industry of the proposals that are under discussion. Rational debate on the issue is absolutely necessary, just as it is necessary for no party in this chamber to reject for political reasons a minimum pricing proposal that must be part of our overall solution to rebalancing this country's relationship with drink.

Class Sizes (Maths and English)

5. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the First Minister how many local authorities are meeting maximum class size guidelines of 20 at secondary 1 and secondary 2 in the key subjects of maths and English. (S3F-2297)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We support the objective of having smaller classes in S1 and S2 maths and English. However, I think that Des McNulty has had an unexpected outbreak of amnesia on the issue. The introduction of the class size maximum of 20 was a manifesto commitment of the previous Administration; yet, by April 2007, it had been changed to having an average class size of 20 for S1 and S2. The Labour Administration also failed to place that target on a statutory basis. That is why the Scottish Government is holding a full review of all the various class size maxima, to sort out the difficulties that the Labour Administration left behind. As Des McNulty knows, we are also taking action to address class sizes in primary 1 and will tomorrow launch a consultation on legislation to reduce the legal maximum for P1 to 25 from the level of 30 that we inherited from the previous Administration.

Des McNulty: It is disappointing that despite having had time to research the matter, the First Minister does not know how many local authorities are meeting that important target. Can he confirm that Scottish National Party-controlled Renfrewshire Council and SNP-controlled East Ayrshire Council are two of the local authorities that are not meeting the target? Will he give the chamber an undertaking to find out how many more local authorities are disregarding the solid commitment that was given prior to May 2007? Can he tell us why class size reductions in English and maths at S1 and S2 are being set aside in order to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in class sizes at primary 1?

The First Minister: It is greatly to be regretted that Des McNulty did not listen to my answer to his first question before he ploughed ahead.

George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): Answer the question.

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: Des McNulty should try to remember what target the previous Administration set.

George Foulkes: He has not answered the question.

The First Minister: The previous Administration started out with a target of a maximum class size of 20—

The Presiding Officer: Order, order.

The First Minister: Are you speaking to Lord Foulkes or to me, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: I was asking for order from George Foulkes, First Minister. Please continue.

The First Minister: With Lord Foulkes's gracious permission, I point out to Des McNulty, who is sitting beside him, that the target started out as a maximum but, in 2007, was changed—admittedly, when he was a back bencher—to an average of 20 in S1 and S2. That is an entirely different target.

I have carried out research on pupil teacher ratios in all the councils in Scotland and can give Des McNulty the figures for the number of pupils per teacher in primary schools. The SNP-led councils have an average of 15.5; the Conservative-led councils have an average of 15.8; the Scottish Liberal Democrat-led councils have an average of 16; and the Labour-led councils have an average of 16.3. No doubt, now that he understands the targets that were set by the previous Administration, Des McNulty will join me and the rest of the chamber in calling on all Labour councils with those high pupil teacher ratios to do better than they have done before.

Violent Offenders (Assessment)

6. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that the assessment and management of violent offenders carried out by criminal justice social work services is robust and consistent across Scotland. (S3F-2286)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government is working closely with partners to ensure the consistent assessment and management of violent offenders. The report of the multi-agency inspection of high-risk offenders, which was published last year, raised issues that the Scottish Government is committed to addressing, and we have accepted all 19 recommendations in the report.

The report recommended that the first step should be to strengthen current practice. That is why we are introducing a new, more consistent approach to risk assessment and management of

offenders and more effective information sharing, and will publish new national standards for criminal justice social work later this year.

Robert Brown: The issue relates to about 2,000 people who were released from prison on a statutory order or licence after serving sentences usually of four years or more for serious violent crime. The First Minister might be aware that the recent Social Work Inspection Agency report found that two thirds of the plans for serious violent offenders had no focus on risk management and that some social work departments did not know whether their work with offenders was effective. The report spoke about uneven and sometimes weak practice in assessment of risk. Does the First Minister agree that the report is surprising and highly worrying? In the light of the recommendations or findings, which were published only last week, will he review his Government's plan of action to ensure that they are dealt with urgently?

The First Minister: As I said to Robert Brown, the multi-agency inspection team, which was made up of SWIA, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and HM inspectorate of prisons, reviewed in detail the handling of 62 offenders who were released between July 2006 and December 2007. Obviously, the bulk of the cases involved offenders who were released under the previous Administration. However, that does not obviate the fact that the 19 recommendations that were made as part of that detailed assessment should be carried into practice. That is what we have undertaken to do and is what we will do.

Given that Scotland has the lowest level of recorded crime for a generation and the highest number of police officers on our streets in Scottish history, we can move forward on criminal justice knowing that serious violent offenders will be properly assessed under the new procedures, and the Scottish public can be assured that they are safer than ever before as a result of the investment in law and order.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The First Minister might have inadvertently misled the chamber in answer to a question from Annabel Goldie concerning the cancellation of committee meetings. It is the case that the Justice Committee was cancelled, which was done on the basis that I could not guarantee a quorum for the meeting. To some extent, Scottish National Party members of the committee were responsible for that, as they could not guarantee that they would be present. In the circumstances, will you give the First Minister the opportunity to clarify the situation and to accept that his party was partly responsible?

The Presiding Officer: By your non-point of order, you have already done that.

Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): Further to that non-point of order, Presiding Officer, could you inform me—a member of the Justice Committee—how we can correct the record with regard to Bill Aitken's statement that SNP members, myself included, were part of the problem and made it impossible to hold a meeting of the Justice Committee a week past Tuesday? At the very least, Mr Aitken, Mr Brown—I believe—and myself were willing and able to attend the meeting and, as far as I understand it, the quorum is three.

The Presiding Officer: Once again—

Bill Aitken: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: No, these are not points of order. You have got the points on the record. I suggest that we suspend until 2.15.

12:33

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

Respite Care

1. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made in providing respite care places. (S3O-9887)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The total provision of all forms of respite in Scotland in 2008-09, on a comparable basis with the 2007-08 data, stood at 174,030 weeks. That represents an increase of 1,150 weeks on 2007-08, when provision was 9,240 weeks more than that in 2006-07.

I have discussed the figures with senior representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, who accept that more needs to be done to increase further the delivery of respite weeks. COSLA leaders have discussed the issue, and the convention will hold further discussions with individual local authorities to take the commitment forward.

Helen Eadie: The Scottish Government pledged in the concordat to deliver 2,000 additional respite weeks in 2008-09 and said in its manifesto that an additional 10,000 weeks per year would be provided, yet it delivered 1,150 additional weeks in 2008-09—as the minister said—which is about 50 per cent of what was promised. In the same period, the number of respite weeks for children with disabilities fell by 1,120 weeks, or 4.7 per cent.

The minister said that she has met COSLA but, given the seriousness of the situation, the number of affected people in our communities and the number of beds that are being blocked in hospitals, will she say what more she will do to ensure that national health service resources are not the target and that hospitals and care homes work much more closely together?

Shona Robison: Delayed discharge is at one of its lowest levels ever, but we must of course always work to do more. I assure Helen Eadie that we are doing that.

As for the commitment, Helen Eadie will remember that the £4 million of additional resources that we provided for additional respite provision will not kick in until the next set of figures appears, which should happen around November. She is correct to say that COSLA said that it would deliver 2,000 weeks more than in 2007-08. COSLA is aware of that and of the commitment to provide an additional 10,000 weeks.

The commitment is national—it does not mean that each local authority must provide an increase in weeks. However, if some local authorities reduce their respite provision by more, other local authorities will have an awful lot more work to do to make up those weeks and deliver the additional 10,000 weeks. I point Helen Eadie in Glasgow City Council's direction and I urge every Labour member who represents Glasgow to have discussions with that council, because it has reduced the number of respite weeks it provides by more than 3,000 since 2006-07. That is a third of the total of 10,000 weeks that we want to deliver. If Glasgow City Council denies carers in its area the respite that they deserve, that makes the situation much harder for other local authorities.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): What respite provision is made in the Highland Health Board area for carers of people with arthritis and psoriatic arthritis? What role in that does the Highland rheumatology unit in Dingwall play?

Shona Robison: I will write to Dave Thompson about the specifics of his questions. As for Highland's contribution to the 10,000 extra weeks of respite provision, the commitment that it has delivered has stayed more or less steady; as is obvious, we encourage the area to do more. The challenge in Highland is delivering innovative respite provision in a rural area with a dispersed population. Future respite provision there is being discussed and I am happy to write to Dave Thompson with more detail about that.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am sure that the minister shares my concern at the drop in the amount of respite care provided for children. I accept and welcome the discussions with COSLA on the general target for respite care, but will she outline what specific action she will take to reverse the decline in respite care for children?

Shona Robison: We should acknowledge that, overall, there has been an increase in respite provision.

Jackie Baillie: No, there has not for children.

Shona Robison: It is true that there has been an increase: we now have 174,030 weeks of respite; in 2006-07, the figure was 163,640 weeks. By anybody's calculations, that is an increase.

There was never an agreed breakdown of the 10,000 weeks that said that so many weeks had to be given to older carers and service users or to younger people. Having said that, I hope and expect that local authorities take account of the needs of all service user groups and their carers within the provision that they make for respite.

NHS Lanarkshire (Meetings)

2. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing last met representatives of NHS Lanarkshire. (S3O-9897)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I meet all health board chairs regularly. The most recent meeting was on 22 February; the next one will take place on 29 March.

Andy Kerr: My question relates to the norovirus season this year, which appears to be later and much more intense than in previous years. There have been significant ward closures. In the latest report, four closures are reported in the NHS Lanarkshire area, with 53 patients affected out of a Scotland-wide total of 257 affected patients.

Is it not time for the cabinet secretary to get her act together? In the words of Hugh Pennington, the Scottish Government continues to be reactive and not proactive. Is it not time to implement the 15-point plan proposed by Labour for tackling health care and hospital-acquired infection? Part of that plan is to increase funding for the reference laboratory and mandatory norovirus reporting. Will she, at last, take some of those crucial measures?

Nicola Sturgeon: Andy Kerr's nerve knows no bounds. As Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, I can stand here and tell him that we have the lowest rates on record of infection in our hospitals. That is not good enough, however—we still have work to do and I am determined that we do it. However, I know that we have the lowest rates of MRSA and *Clostridium difficile* on record. When Andy Kerr sat in my seat, he could not say that, because for most of his tenure as Minister for Health and Community Care, he did not even bother to collect the data on *C. difficile*. That is the reality. Although I will repeat time and again that tackling infection in hospitals is my top priority, I will not take lessons from Andy Kerr and Labour members.

Norovirus is a serious issue in the health service. Boards are required to manage the pressures from norovirus. As Andy Kerr should be aware, the issue faces the health service every year, particularly during the winter months. We report on the incidence of norovirus—we have been doing that for the past number of weeks. In the circumstances, health boards have been doing a good job of managing the pressures and I place on record my thanks to all national health service staff who deal so well with the issue to ensure that patients are cared for appropriately.

Respite (Carer Support)

3. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on recent figures suggesting that many local authorities are reducing respite hours and what actions will be included in the carers and young carers strategy to ensure that reductions do not impact on its stated aim of achieving “rapid, significant and sustainable” improvements in carer support. (S3O-9914)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): The concordat commitment to extra respite weeks is at a national level rather than at the level of individual councils. That said, I am disappointed at the extent to which significant reductions in provision in a few council areas have offset the good progress that has been made by others. If those authorities had just held their provision steady in 2008-09, the overall provision in Scotland would have increased by a further 6,500 weeks.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities accepts that more needs to be done to increase the delivery of respite weeks. In partnership with COSLA, the Government is developing a carers and young carers strategy. Within that strategy there will be a focus on short breaks, recognising the importance of respite for carers and the people they care for.

Cathy Peattie: Given the feeble and patchy progress towards the manifesto commitment to provide an additional 10,000 weeks of respite care, is the minister aware that many carers report problems, such as having been made to jump through hoops to access respite care? Some carers get little or nothing at all, and some carers tell me that they have never had a week's family holiday. What will the minister do to ensure that the money allocated by the Scottish Government to meet the needs of carers is used for that purpose?

Shona Robison: First, I recognise Cathy Peattie's long-standing interest in the issue.

COSLA leaders have discussed the issue, and they understand that, although ring fencing no longer exists, the £4 million that was allocated—which applies not to the 2,000 weeks but to the next set of figures—was intended for respite provision.

I urge members on all sides of the chamber to raise the issue with their local authorities. Glasgow City Council received the lion's share of the £4 million—£600,000—and yet, as I said, it has reduced respite care by 3,000 weeks, which is a third of the total that we want to achieve in extra weeks. That makes it tough for other local authorities to make up the difference. I urge Cathy

Peattie and other members to make representations to their own local authorities.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In the past 12 to 18 months, 127 beds have been removed across NHS Highland, many of which were used for respite care. How can appropriate respite care be met against that background of cuts?

Shona Robison: Respite care takes place in a number of settings, and I will certainly look into what has happened with the resources that have been freed up by the reduction in those beds. I know that Mary Scanlon has followed the discussions on the reshaping care for older people agenda, which is very much about moving resource from the acute sector into community provision to ensure that community-based services, whether in home-like settings or the person's own home, can be provided. I will certainly look into the issue that she raises in more detail.

Nurses and Midwives (Employment)

4. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to secure employment for recently qualified nurses and midwives. (S3O-9904)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): We have a one-year job guarantee scheme for nurses and midwives who, through no fault of their own, have difficulties finding employment. The scheme is designed to ensure that all newly qualified nurses and midwives have the opportunity to build on the clinical experience that they gain during their pre-registration programme.

Ken Macintosh: The scheme is welcome and has been in place for eight or 10 years. Is the minister aware of growing concerns over the past six months about health boards not recruiting to nursing and midwifery posts? Does she have access to the most up-to-date information on that and, in particular, does she know how many posts are under review and how many are being actively recruited to?

Is the minister also aware of any concerns about access to the midwifery bank in Glasgow in particular? There was a problem a year or so back, so I hope that she will take that point on board and look into any concerns that prevent newly qualified midwives from gaining the experience that they need through access to the bank.

Nicola Sturgeon: If Ken Macintosh wants to write to me on that last point with his specific concerns about access to the midwifery bank, I will be more than happy to look into them.

On Ken Macintosh's more general point, it is incumbent on all NHS boards to assess their requirements for nurses, midwives and other staff. We have then to ensure that, as far as is possible, we match the supply of nurses, midwives and so on to that demand, which is why we have robust workforce planning arrangements in place. As members will be aware, workforce planning is not an exact science, but it is nevertheless important that robust arrangements are in place. I am more than happy to provide Ken Macintosh with further details on how that process works.

The reason for the one-year job guarantee scheme is to recognise that, in some circumstances and through no fault of their own, newly qualified nurses and midwives will not immediately be able to access a job. The scheme means that they will have access to jobs, to ensure that the skills that they have gained during their training do not go to waste. The scheme has been in place for some time, but that does not mean that it is not worth while. Any newly qualified nurse or midwife who finds themselves without a job can access the scheme.

Junior Doctors (Recruitment in Remote and Rural Areas)

5. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to recruit and retain junior doctors, particularly in remote and rural areas. (S3O-9893)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The recruitment of junior doctors into postgraduate training programmes is managed nationally by NHS Education for Scotland. The process for 2010 is under way and application rates are good, at around five applications for each post. NES has developed a marketing strategy that includes material on training and working in remote and rural areas.

Rhoda Grant: I thank the minister for that response, but she will be aware that there are real concerns about the lack of junior doctors and the impact that that will have on health care in remote and rural areas. A shortage of doctors could lead to some services in those areas becoming unsustainable.

How many unfilled junior doctor posts are there at the moment? How many posts will be available in August, and how many junior doctors will be available to fill them?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I said, the application rates for the 2010 round of applications for junior doctor posts are healthy. I will give the member some information on that. For the 423 posts that are recruited for in Scotland—the remainder are recruited for throughout the United Kingdom—

there have been 2,854 applications, which equates to a ratio of around five and a half applications per post. I understand Rhoda Grant's point, but the indications at this stage of the recruitment process are reasonably healthy.

Having said that, we know—Rhoda Grant knows, and I am certainly very aware—of the particular challenges that exist in recruiting doctors to remote and rural parts of the country. That is why the initiatives in our remote and rural strategy are so important: they are about trying to secure the sustainability of services in those areas.

Many of our initiatives help to make the posts in those areas more attractive. For example, a couple of weeks ago I launched the flying doctors service; many clinicians would say that the back-up of such a service makes working in remote and rural areas more attractive.

A number of specific remote and rural initiatives are under way to serve the needs of rural general hospitals, including a general practitioner rural track, and rural track specialty training in general surgery, rural medicine and anaesthetics. We are aware of the challenges, but are committed, through that range of initiatives and others, to ensuring that we can recruit to those areas and secure the sustainability of services there.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of—indeed, she has mentioned—some of the issues around recruiting doctors to some of Scotland's smallest and most remote practices. Those include island practices such as that in Pairc on Lewis. What will the Scottish Government do to ensure that the particular issues that face island practices are addressed?

Nicola Sturgeon: Alasdair Allan is right to point to the particular challenges for island health boards. Some of the initiatives that I mentioned in response to Rhoda Grant's question are as relevant and applicable to island boards as they are to more remote parts of mainland Scotland.

It is important that we seek to attract clinicians to work in those areas. I take the view, as I am sure all members do, that just because someone lives in a more rural part of Scotland—as one in five of the population do—that does not mean that they do not have the right to expect the same level of access to health services. There are challenges in providing that, but the range of initiatives that are under way as part of the remote and rural strategy will—I hope—be able to address those positively.

Dounby Community Pharmacy (Decision)

6. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive—perhaps rather needlessly at this point—when it expects a decision from NHS

Orkney in relation to the application by NorsePharm Ltd to open a community pharmacy in Dounby, Orkney. (S3O-9922)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Decisions in relation to applications to provide national health service pharmaceutical services are matters for the relevant NHS board. However, I am aware that NHS Orkney issued a news release on 12 March that indicated that the application to which the member refers has been rejected.

Liam McArthur: NHS Orkney's decision last week to reject NorsePharm's application, which the minister mentioned, has been broadly welcomed in my constituency, although concerns remain in relation to the prospect of an appeal.

The minister will recall from our earlier exchanges on the matter the extent of anxiety among patients in the west Mainland of Orkney about the impact that a successful application would have on wider health care services. Last week's decision aside, is she aware of any new application that might be made in relation to the site or which might affect the community? What assurances can she give staff and patients at the local Dounby general practice that they do not face the prospect of a cycle of applications, with all the uncertainty that that entails? In that context, and given that the relevant neighbourhood in this case is defined as Dounby village, which comprises 550 people—that calls into question the financial viability of the NorsePharm application or any future application—will she agree to look again at the current pharmacy regulations to see whether limits can be placed on the time that must elapse before relevant neighbourhood definitions may be challenged?

Shona Robison: I am not aware of any new application at the moment, although that does not mean that there will not be any. Under the current legislation we cannot prevent applications altogether, whether it is for the same premises or for the same neighbourhood, simply on the basis that a previous application has been rejected.

We are aware of the issue, however, which was raised by a number of stakeholders during discussions in the summer and autumn of last year. We will make some proposals in our consultation, which we will issue next week, and I will ensure that the member—and indeed all members—receive a copy of that consultation.

Dentists (Aberdeen)

7. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to address the shortage of dentists in Aberdeen. (S3O-9930)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Responsibility for the overall provision of national health service dental services in the area rests with NHS Grampian. The board is undertaking a range of measures to improve access to NHS dental services in Aberdeen, including the opening of the Aberdeen dental school facility in January this year. The number of dentists has increased from 270, as at September 2007, to 304 as at September 2009.

Nicol Stephen: I appreciate some of the positive measures that have been taken by NHS Grampian, and I particularly welcome the opening of Aberdeen dental school, but there remains a dental health crisis in the city of Aberdeen. The Government has a core NHS target—a health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment or HEAT target—that 80 per cent of children aged three to five should be registered with an NHS dentist by 2010-11. The figure in Aberdeen South is currently 31.5 per cent, a worryingly low figure that will alarm many MSPs. That is one of the poorest levels of provision in the whole of Scotland. Does the minister expect the Government's target to be met in Aberdeen South? If so, how will that be achieved?

Shona Robison: Good progress has been made with the target for the registration of three to five-year-olds. The HEAT target has been exceeded in Aberdeen City, with 94.7 per cent of children aged three to five years registered with a dentist under NHS arrangements.

In addition to the number of dentists, which I set out in my original answer, NHS Grampian recorded the largest ever increase in the number of independent dentists in 2008-09. Aberdeen City has shown the largest increase in the number of such dentists, with 65 of them in post.

I am sure that Nicol Stephen is more than aware of NHS Grampian's dental plan, which has set a target of registering an additional 125,000 people by 2012. Between June 2007 and September 2009, an additional 61,500 people, of whom 13,000 were children, were registered with a dentist in Grampian. I hope that Nicol Stephen will applaud and welcome that progress.

Of course there is more work to be done, and we are determined to ensure that that work progresses at the speed that it has already attained.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I thank the minister for informing the Parliament of the increase in the number of people who are now registered with NHS dentists. Can she tell us what further consideration has been given to making it more attractive for dentists to add to their NHS patient lists or to open their lists to NHS patients?

Shona Robison: There are already a number of incentives, including golden hellos, and allowances for areas of deprivation and rurality. We can always consider how to use those allowances to get dentists to go to the areas that remain a challenge.

Another measure that I introduced after taking over responsibility for dentistry was to extend the NHS commitment arrangements to include a partial commitment. Many dental practices that did not quite fulfil the criteria for NHS commitment were nevertheless doing a lot of NHS work, which I felt it was important to recognise. I can tell Brian Adam that about 14 or 15 practices within NHS Grampian have now taken up the offer of being a partially committed NHS dentist. I hope that the member will welcome that.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the last part of the minister's comments. Can she tell me whether, in Aberdeen and elsewhere, there is any record of dentists who left the NHS ever returning to the service? Has she given any consideration to how such dentists might be attracted back?

Shona Robison: I can certainly find out whether that information exists—I am not sure whether it does—and write to the member about that.

Dentistry in Scotland is currently a very attractive proposition to dentists, not just those who are trained in Scotland but those who are trained south of the border, who certainly seem to think that our arrangements for dentistry are far preferable to the contractual arrangements that exist down south. We are attracting a lot of dentists north of the border. I will be happy to provide Nanette Milne with the figures on that, if they exist.

Suicide (Young People)

8. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what is being done to address concerns over the rate of suicide among young people in Scotland. (S3O-9873)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Children and young people have been a priority group for suicide prevention work in Scotland since 2002. We have a number of measures in place to address the issue. We provide grant funding of £130,000 per year to ChildLine Scotland to support its on-going operation, through which trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advise and protect children and young people who may feel they have nowhere else to turn. We are also working closely with NHS boards and other partners to fully implement "The Mental Health of Children and Young People: A Framework for Promotion,

Prevention and Care” by 2015. That includes making a named mental health link worker available to every school to ensure that the mental health needs of pupils are identified at the earliest possible opportunity and that links are in place to child and adolescent mental health services.

John Wilson: What specialist training in suicide prevention is currently available to those who work with children and young people, and what is being done to increase the uptake of such services? Also, have any lessons been learned from the targeted national strategy for suicide prevention in the United States?

Shona Robison: On the member's last point, I can assure him that we are always looking at international evidence to see what we can learn from elsewhere. However, many people have been coming to Scotland to look at our choose life programme. For example, Northern Ireland has by and large based its service around the lessons that have been learned from developments here in Scotland.

Training is made available to school staff—including teachers, guidance staff and librarians—and parents on suicide awareness and intervention. Training courses such as applied suicide intervention skills training and safeTALK are going very well. It is important that those who come into contact with children and young people on a day-to-day basis know what to do, are able to recognise the signs of concern and are sufficiently trained to feel confident about acting in a way that will be helpful to the young person.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The minister mentioned the choose life programme. As she will be aware, research by Professor Rory O'Connor of the University of Stirling suggests that 14 per cent of Scottish pupils have already self-harmed and a further 14 per cent have had serious thoughts about doing so. Will she comment on the fact that, since ring fencing ended, funding for choose life programmes has been reduced by some authorities, including Western Isles Council and Highland Council, which have the highest suicide levels not just in Scotland but in the whole of the United Kingdom?

Shona Robison: Certainly, the feedback that I have received from travelling the length and breadth of Scotland is that very hard work is being done on the choose life agenda not just by local authorities but by NHS staff and others. Tackling the issue that Richard Simpson has highlighted is certainly a core component of what the choose life programme sets out to do through delivering awareness-raising sessions on self-harm and promoting mental health and wellbeing in schools. In addition, we have just invested in child and adolescent mental health services to ensure that

children who require additional support get the service that they need. Richard Simpson will acknowledge that that welcome investment was not made previously.

Dental Care

9. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making towards the 2010 target for 90 per cent of adults to have all or some of their own teeth. (S3O-9941)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We are making substantial progress towards meeting the dental action plan target. Figures from “The Scottish Health Survey 2008” show that 88 per cent of adults in 2008 had all or some of their own natural teeth. The 2010 target for 65 per cent of adults aged 55 to 74 to have some of their own teeth has already been exceeded. In 2008, 81 per cent of men and 75 per cent of women had some natural teeth.

Joe FitzPatrick: The minister's answer seems to have cleared the public gallery of all the young folk who were there. Perhaps they are heading off to the dentist.

I welcome the progress that the Government is making on the matter, but what can we do to improve dental care in Scotland further? Will the primary care modernisation programme take into account the need for further investment in dentistry?

Shona Robison: I am sure that the oral health of the children who have just left the public gallery is perfect because of the chil- smile investment that we have been making in schools the length and breadth of Scotland.

The primary care modernisation fund amounts to £82 million over two years, and I can confirm that £58 million of that has been allocated to dentistry. I am pleased about that, as dentistry was a top priority for that investment. We are now seeing dental centres and facilities throughout Scotland that are fit for the 21st century, and we are extremely proud of that.

Western Isles Hospital (Power Failures)

10. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what representations it will be making to the relevant agencies, including Scottish and Southern Energy, regarding repeated power failures at the Western Isles hospital. (S3O-9934)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): It is important to be clear that the recent power issues that were experienced at the Western Isles hospital were the result of a faulty

circuit breaker on the hospital site as opposed to a fault with the mains power supply. Nonetheless, I know that NHS Western Isles worked assiduously with its partners, including Scottish and Southern Energy, to rectify the problem as quickly as possible. I have been further assured that the board's contingency measures minimised the impact on patient services while maintaining clinical safety.

Alasdair Allan: Although the power failures did not pose a risk to patients' health, they raised serious questions about the fragility of the electricity infrastructure in the islands. Will the Government keep up a dialogue with SSE and other agencies to ensure that such problems do not occur again?

Nicola Sturgeon: I expect NHS Western Isles to do that in the case of its own power supply. The member will be aware that there were four short supply failures at the Western Isles hospital between January and July 2009. In all four instances, the backup generator kicked in and there was no impact. However, more recently, a problem with the circuit breaker was discovered, which meant that, in the event of a mains failure, the hospital would not be able to switch to the emergency generator—that could be done manually, but it would take 15 minutes. That is what required the contingency measures to be put in place.

I have been assured by NHS Western Isles that it has revised and strengthened its contingency measures in the light of that experience and that it has done so with the full engagement of Scottish and Southern Energy to ensure the continuity of the power supply to the hospital. For example, the board has backup battery units in place to protect the power supply to key clinical areas such as surgical theatres. I have also been assured that NHS Western Isles has generators to provide standalone additional supply to the Uist and Barra hospital.

I assure Alasdair Allan that NHS Western Isles and I take the issue very seriously and that discussions with Scottish and Southern Energy will continue in order not only to minimise the chances of such problems occurring again, but to ensure that, should they occur again, the right contingency measures will be in place.

Asylum Seekers (Housing)

11. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions have taken place with local authorities regarding housing provision for asylum seekers. (S3O-9889)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Housing for asylum seekers in Scotland is a matter for the United Kingdom

Border Agency and Glasgow City Council, as it is the only local authority in Scotland to have a contract with the UKBA to provide accommodation to asylum seekers. However, Scottish Government officials regularly attend the multiagency move on group, which includes Glasgow City Council, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' strategic migration partnership, Glasgow Housing Association, YMCA Scotland, the Scottish Refugee Council and Jobcentre Plus. The group was initially set up in 2007 to address the issues resulting from the case resolution process. However, it continues to meet to discuss emerging issues in relation to asylum seekers and those recently granted refugee status.

George Foulkes: I thank the minister for his helpful reply. My question is also meant to be helpful.

The minister has confirmed that Glasgow is still the only local authority that has an agreement with the Border Agency, through the Home Office, for the housing of asylum seekers. That results in a huge burden being placed on Glasgow City Council and difficulty for refugees, as we have, sadly, seen recently.

Earlier this week, I asked Lord West, the Home Office minister, whether he would discuss with other Scottish local authorities the possibility of their sharing the responsibility for the housing of asylum seekers, which would also give the Home Office more choice. Will the minister take up that issue with local authorities and ask them to re-enter discussions with the Home Office, through the Border Agency, so that there can be some easing of the burden of responsibility that currently rests on Glasgow City Council?

Alex Neil: George Foulkes makes a valid point, and I appreciate the initiative that he has taken with Lord West. I am happy to raise the issue at my next regular meeting with COSLA to see whether something more can be done on this issue.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

12. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S3O-9901)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I last met representatives of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde on 16 March 2010 when I performed the sod-cutting for the new Southern general hospital.

Mr McAveety: In the spirit of the undertaking that the cabinet secretary gave a few weeks ago to adopt a political style that is less judgmental and more collaborative, will she indicate what

discussions she has had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde about how to maximise the potential health benefits of the 2014 Commonwealth games? Will her department look positively on working with local schools, such as St Mungo's academy and Eastbank academy, on ways in which to promote good health and wellbeing across the east end, particularly in relation to young school pupils?

I note that it was pupils from Eastbank academy who left the public gallery just before Joe FitzPatrick spoke—a wonderful judgment from my constituents.

Nicola Sturgeon: I could say that the Eastbank academy pupils left the gallery in anticipation of Frank McAveety's question, but that would not be in keeping with my new consensual approach to politics, so I will not go there.

Jack McConnell (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): Apologise!

Nicola Sturgeon: As always, I say that I am sorry to Jack McConnell—for what, I will not go into.

Mr McAveety: Statement!

Nicola Sturgeon: Moving swiftly on, Frank McAveety raises an important point, and I am grateful to him for the way in which he raised it.

Mr McAveety will be aware of the existence and content of the ambitious legacy plan that we have put in place for the Commonwealth games. Health is a central component of that legacy plan and I would expect NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and other health boards across Scotland to engage constructively with that. I and the Minister for Public Health and Sport will always be happy to consider any suggestions for how we might be able to get further benefits from an event that represents a fantastic opportunity, for not only Glasgow but the rest of Scotland.

NHS Lothian (Meetings)

14. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when ministers last met NHS Lothian and what issues were discussed. (S3O-9909)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I met the senior team of NHS Lothian on 5 October 2009, when I chaired the board's annual review. The board's performance on key national health targets, including health improvement, efficiency, waiting times and service changes were discussed.

I regularly meet all national health service chairs to discuss matters of importance. I last met the

chair of NHS Lothian yesterday, and we discussed a range of issues.

Mary Mulligan: In today's *West Lothian Courier*, Scottish National Party councillor and Lothian health board member Peter Johnston says that

"a line was drawn in the sand by the ... SNP"

following the transfer of services from St John's hospital to Edinburgh royal infirmary. When the cabinet secretary receives the petition from the councillors who are campaigning to save St John's hospital and asking her to keep her promise—and that of other local SNP members of the Scottish Parliament—to return trauma, orthopaedics and emergency surgery to St John's, will she agree to their demand or break another promise?

Nicola Sturgeon: I say to Mary Mulligan as consensually as I can that I suspect that what Peter Johnston—the fantastic leader of West Lothian Council—was saying is that a hospital that under the previous Administration was drained of services step by step and drained of its life is now, under the SNP Administration, secured as an acute hospital within NHS Lothian. There have been a number of positive developments at St John's. To give Mary Mulligan a couple of examples, there has been investment to develop the short-stay surgical centre and the endoscopy unit.

St John's is now a vibrant, busy hospital, which stands in sharp contrast to its situation under the previous Administration. I look forward to NHS Lothian continuing to examine what further services can be provided from St John's. I am glad to say again that, for as long as I am health secretary and as long as the Government is in office, St John's has a rosy future as an acute hospital in Lothian.

Malawi (International Development)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on international development in Malawi.

14:57

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I welcome this debate and the opportunity to inform members of the outcomes of my recent visit to Malawi and the progress that is being made on addressing the key priorities of the Scottish Government's Malawi development programme.

Scotland and Malawi have a long history of collaboration. Scots have worked with the people of Malawi for more than 150 years, particularly in the areas of health and education. Scotland's relationship with Malawi is about people and communities working together to develop further the strong civic bond that exists between our two countries. We have developed a unique model that demonstrates good practice in international development. Credit must go to other parties in the Parliament and, indeed, to the previous Administration for helping to develop that co-operation agreement.

The Scottish Government's Malawi development programme builds on the strengths of that unique relationship. It also provides a more focused contribution by addressing the four key priority areas that were identified by the Government of Malawi and which are set out in the co-operation agreement—health, education, sustainable economic development, and civic society development and governance. That work is being taken forward by organisations in Scotland that are working in partnership with colleagues in Malawi to meet the specific needs of the people of Malawi.

I visited a number of projects representing each strand of the co-operation agreement. I was particularly interested in and encouraged by the partnership approach. I was encouraged not only by the work that non-governmental organisations are doing but by the time and effort that communities are investing to ensure that local people are part of the decision-making process and that they can create and shape their own futures. It is essential that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are given help and support to empower them to make changes to develop longer-term sustainability and provide a lasting legacy.

Nowhere was that more evident than when I launched the capacity building for enterprise

project in Blantyre. That project has been taken forward by the Scotland-Malawi business group in partnership with Challenges Worldwide and key businesspeople in Malawi. It is providing much-needed business support and advice to individuals and small businesses, many of which are run by women, to help them with the initial start-up and to help them to become sustainable.

However, it would be naive not to recognise that there are big challenges, some of which are not without controversy. We have seen the accusations in the media regarding the inappropriate use of resources and concerns about human rights in Malawi. Let me set out clearly the Scottish Government's position and response. On funding, Scottish Government funds are provided to organisations in Scotland that have demonstrated that they have the relevant skills, capacity and expertise to deliver services on the ground directly to the people of Malawi. We do not provide grant funding directly to the Government of Malawi. Our approach remains to support communities and organisations through an open and transparent process. All grants that are awarded have strict conditions, and there are checks to ensure that money is directed to our priority areas and agreed development activities. Our approach includes a commitment to rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures.

As a minister, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual cases that are currently subject to the independent judicial system of Malawi, but during my meetings with the Government of Malawi I relayed concerns that have been expressed in Scotland about the general issue of human rights in relation to gay rights. As part of our international development policy, the Scottish Government will not consider funding projects that discriminate between individuals or groups in that way. The Scottish Government believes that there is no place for prejudice or discrimination, and that everyone deserves to be treated fairly, regardless of their religion, race, sexual orientation, gender, age or disability.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the minister for those remarks, which will be welcomed throughout the chamber. Does she recognise that the attitude of the Government of Malawi and actions that are taking place in Malawi in relation to the rights of gay people impact on the work to combat HIV and AIDS, as they make it more difficult to identify people who may need support and to present appropriate material that advises them of behaviours that should reduce the risk of AIDS?

Fiona Hyslop: The member makes an important point. That issue is one of the reasons why the Scottish Government has supported

Waverley Care, for example, and proposals that it has made in working with people with HIV and AIDS, regardless of their sexual orientation. It is important that we have a respectful discussion with a Government that has a judicial system and experiences that are different from ours. One point that I relayed to the Government of Malawi was that human rights must be respected across the globe. Perhaps because of their culture, people come to the issue at different times and from different perspectives. Iain Smith clearly identified the health agenda. There are many challenges in Malawi—I saw at first hand what they are—and addressing them demands an atmosphere of respect, confidence and trust. I made it clear that that is our view.

I am keen that we work more closely together on civic society development and governance. There is much that we can do to work with the people of Malawi to strengthen the human rights context within civic society and governance systems. I recognise the important contribution that the Scottish Parliament is making towards civic governance in Malawi. I was pleased to host jointly, with Michael Matheson and Karen Gillon, a workshop for members of the National Assembly of Malawi. More than 70 per cent of that Assembly's members are new since the elections in May 2009. Furthermore, the Government has moved from being a minority Government to being a Government with a significant majority. That in itself brings a further set of challenges for the parliamentary process. The National Assembly of Malawi indicated that it would welcome support from the Scottish Parliament to explore some of the challenges and barriers to strengthening governance. I look forward to hearing more from Michael Matheson and Karen Gillon about their experiences if there is the opportunity to do so, and to hearing about how the Scottish Parliament is looking to take forward its work with that Assembly. I offer the Scottish Government's co-operation and support for that work.

The core of the Scottish Government's engagement is, of course, to deliver on priorities that reflect the needs and preferences of the people of Malawi, not something that is imposed by others. Our focus remains firmly centred on people and empowering communities to address specific development outcomes. However, it is essential that the Governments in both countries have a shared vision and direction for the programme, that they continue to monitor progress, and that we encourage the sharing of best practice and learning from each other.

During my visit, I met ministers from the Government of Malawi to reaffirm the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver on the co-operation agreement. It is important that we continue to achieve outcomes for the people of

Malawi that further strengthen our relationship with both the Government of Malawi and our key delivery partners. I met a number of ministers and officials who cover the key areas of Scottish Government-funded activity in Malawi, and was encouraged by the commitment that was expressed and the enthusiasm for working more closely to deepen the relationship between our two countries. I place on record my thanks to the Government of Malawi for its invitation to visit and for the time and commitment of ministers during my visit.

I was briefed on the President's priorities for the African Union for the next year, now that he has been appointed its chair. Those priorities are food security, infrastructure and energy, all of which are areas in which Scotland has something tangible to offer. I raised the issue of Malawi's engagement with the European Union and discussed the potential for us to work together to support project sponsors to unlock EU funds. An example of that is the Scottish Government support for the Opportunity International programme, which has been instrumental in releasing additional EU funds. I also met the head of co-operation for the Flemish Government and discussed our respective programmes and areas of mutual interest, including food security and agricultural exchanges.

Our support for the Malawian people through aid continues. Earlier today, I was pleased to announce a funding package for Malawi of more than £7 million over three financial years. We have already committed a minimum of £3 million for the financial year 2009-10. Together with on-going projects, more than £4 million will go directly to Scotland-based organisations to support their work in Malawi in 2010-11. I was pleased to see applications for some of the less-developed areas of the programme, such as agriculture. For example, the application from the Scottish Crop Research Institute will strengthen the development of sustainable potato production in Malawi, which will contribute to food security and improve the livelihoods of workers.

Scotland has a lot more to offer in skills and knowledge. There is a clear and genuine willingness from the people of Scotland not only to be involved, but to ensure that we do it well. Members are all aware of the strong links that exist in our constituencies, ranging from church groups to universities, colleges, schools and wider community groups. I cannot go anywhere in Scotland without finding someone or some community that has a long and deep relationship with Malawi. All that contributes to the on-going work to help Malawians to work themselves out of poverty. However, I recognise that the answer is not always about funding. The Government also has a role in encouraging and facilitating others to

make progress with important and innovative ideas. Where we can, we should broker partnerships to ensure that we contribute to the delivery of effective aid and development.

We will continue to consider new approaches and other areas in which the Scottish Government can provide support or assistance. I reaffirm the Scottish Government's commitment to our work with Malawi and assure members that I will continue to drive forward a programme that is focused and based on the priorities that have been identified and agreed with the Government of Malawi and models of best practice.

Several members have visited Malawi in recent months and years, and I look forward to their speeches. We continue to forge a relationship that has lasted 150 years. The strength and depth of that relationship has been enhanced by the work of the Government, the previous Scottish Executive and the Parliament. It is important that we share that experience. We must also take the temperature of where we are now and reflect on what the direction of travel should be in future.

15:08

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab): The tourist board of Malawi states:

"The Warm Heart of Africa is beating faster now and the legendary welcome is there for all who wish to experience the unrivalled combination of Lake, Landscape and Wildlife in one of Africa's most beautiful countries. Malawi is like none other in Africa: small, yet with an immense diversity of scenery and a vast inland sea."

Members who have had the opportunity to see the country for themselves can testify to the truth of that statement. I have not had the pleasure of visiting the small but renowned African country, but it is well known to me. I know about the affinity that my colleagues Karen Gillon, Patricia Ferguson and Jack McConnell feel for Malawi. The minister seems to have that same affinity as a result of her experience.

I understand Malawi's significance to Scotland and, crucially, the significance of the Scotland Malawi Partnership as a model of good practice in international development. I know that behind the beauty of Malawi is the challenge for the Malawi Government, which governs over one of the poorest countries in Africa. That young democracy, in which 43 per cent of members of Parliament are women, is charged with improving average life expectancy, which is currently 47; preventing avoidable deaths; improving the infant mortality rate of 86 out of 1,000 babies; and giving every child a decent education. The issue of reducing class sizes in Malawi is on a different scale from the issue here. Even the Scottish National Party Government could not fail to reduce class sizes from 100. No child can possibly get the

attention that they need to learn in such circumstances. The role that we should play—and which we clearly are playing—is to build Malawi's capacity to deal with its own problems.

As the minister said, Scotland's connection with Malawi dates back to the 19th century. Jack McConnell's Administration built on that connection, which is unique and critical for both countries. To its credit, the Scottish Government has continued the previous Administration's commitment and has maintained a strong partnership. There is also a financial commitment—I welcome Fiona Hyslop's announcement of further money for Malawi. Our partnership complements the United Kingdom's international development strategy and its Malawi country assistance plan, which amounts to £70 million a year for four years—a significant amount for health and education.

It is important to note that the agreement with Malawi is reciprocal, which means that Scotland benefits from our partnership, too. We can share the experience of Malawi's long-established ombudsmen and our nurses and doctors can experience for themselves acute health problems in Malawi in a way that they could never do here. This afternoon, I learned from Karen Gillon that two schools in my constituency—Anderston primary school and Hillhead primary school—have been participating in some of the Scotland Malawi Partnership work.

We know that Scotland can make a huge difference in helping Malawi to tackle its low life expectancy and Malawi can give us experiences in return. The prevalence of HIV contributes to Malawi's low life expectancy; it deprives the country of its professionals, children and primary carers. Many people recognise that Malawi has made significant progress in tackling the incidence of HIV, which is beginning to reduce. However, the bill that is due to go before the Parliament in Malawi in June has its critics, because compulsory testing and prescribing criminal punishments for the transmission of HIV are controversial. It is important to recognise that a balance has to be struck when we create legislation. Christian Aid, supported by other agencies, has called on the Scottish Government to raise the issue of HIV with the Malawi Government. I agree that that should be done, if it is done sensitively, with a recognition of the good work that the Malawi Government has done. I note the answers that the minister gave to Patricia Ferguson's questions on that subject.

We should not jeopardise the benefits of our partnership, but as a responsible partner it would be remiss of us not to comment on certain issues, because that would undermine our commitment to human rights. We argue for human rights anywhere in the world where they are undermined.

Article 20 of Malawi's constitution prohibits discrimination on any ground. We hope that, in time, that is acted on. We must ask the Malawi Government to address the case of the two men who were arrested and imprisoned for homosexuality—we hope that it will. We must condemn the treatment of those individuals, as many civic society organisations in Malawi itself have done. I believe that a sign of a mature friendship is being able to talk about differences without fundamentally damaging the relationship. Malawi is a developing country with its own culture and history and it needs time to change and adjust. We must play our part in ensuring that, as it develops, it fully encompasses basic human rights and freedoms.

When Iain Smith raised that issue with the minister, it struck me that we are still campaigning vigorously in this country for lesbian and gay rights, which are not quite as they should be. It was not so long ago that a minister in this Parliament was vilified for leading the campaign to revoke section 28, so we need to see things in context.

Poorer countries have a lot to offer Scotland. They are a critical reminder for those of us who want to pursue a progressive international policy that we have a responsibility to the developing world. As we use up the world's valuable resources, we have a duty to developing countries. Policies that promote fair trade are vital for poorer countries to develop their products and markets. As an internationalist, I believe that the eradication of poverty goes much wider than eradicating it at home—it has to be a global strategy. I am proud of Labour's record in international development and its aims to eradicate child poverty across Africa with full debt cancellation for the 18 poorest countries. Our responsibilities to developing countries must be part of our response to the global financial crisis.

As we have discussed previously, the model of co-operation is a progressive one. Indeed, the model is used by colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. There is also a desire in the Commonwealth for similar partnerships to be established with Swaziland. Our strategy is not simply about aid but about helping Malawi to stand on its own two feet. Our overall aim is for our mutual friendship to remain but for Malawi not to need our assistance.

The critical point in that regard is that we should use the skills that we have in Scotland that best suit Malawi's needs. My limited experience of helping countries in either a conflict or development situation tells me that we often get that wrong. From my work to help Palestinians to get medical aid, I know that countries around the

world often donate the drugs that suit them in giving assistance. The donation can be more political than practical. Our civic governance and maternal health exchange programmes, which enable Malawians to see what we do in Scotland, are a sound basis for starting to build capacity. I hope that other countries will use that as a model.

I welcome the debate on a topic that is part of the Government international development strategy. I hope that the Parliament will be given the opportunity at a later date to debate in more detail the rest of the international strategy. I would like to know a bit more about the Government work in sub-Saharan Africa and south-east Asia. I have been involved in international development for most of my adult life. I am genuinely proud of what the Scottish Parliament is doing in that regard. Successive Governments of all political colours should be in this for the long haul. That is what matters. That is how we will truly develop our countries to our mutual benefit.

Zikomo. I believe that that means thank you.

15:16

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife (Con): In previous speeches on Malawi, I have drawn attention to some of the huge problems that that beautiful country faces. The abiding image of my visit some five years' ago is of coffins being assembled in street corner joiner shops. I recall telling members on my return that premature death seemed to be the country's only growth industry. There are still many reasons for being concerned about Malawi but, thankfully, these days there is also much to be grateful for.

I have a far more hopeful image of Malawi for members today. It is of Montfort College in Limbe, which I visited, where blind and visually handicapped children from all over Malawi are taught how to use computers as part of a University of Strathclyde-organised programme. Some 32 schools have been involved in the programme and around 434 visually impaired students are now being prepared for the workplace who previously would likely have been reduced to begging in the streets. That is just one of hundreds of initiatives by Scottish organisations in Malawi that are literally transforming lives.

The Scotland Malawi Partnership is helping Malawi to achieve the so-called millennium development goals through increased collaboration in civic governance and society, sustainable economic development, health and—in particular—education. I will concentrate on education.

I welcome the minister's announcement of £7 million to improve further the quality of life for

ordinary Malawians. The money will help several education projects. As Nelson Mandela said:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Scotland is helping to change the small piece of the developing world that is Malawi, and it is doing so literally a school at a time. Many Scottish schools have pledged to do all that they can in a whole range of educational projects to help Malawi. At college level, through funding from the Scottish Government, famous institutes of learning such as the University of St Andrews and the University of Stirling in the Mid Scotland and Fife region and Fife-based further education colleges such as Adam Smith College in Kirkcaldy and Elmwood College in Cupar are rolling out educational programmes, all of which are aimed at assisting Malawi.

My local university in St Andrews is twinned with the University of Malawi college of medicine and is helping with curriculum building, information technology capability and continuing professional development of health professionals. The University of Stirling is continuing a Scottish Government programme that provides training on skills that are geared towards entrepreneurship in aquaculture in an attempt to meet the goal of sustainability in locally-produced fish. The University of Stirling is twinned with Bunda college of agriculture. It is helping students to experience the commercial world through networking, support and advice. Of course, Dr Sylvia Jackson, who secured £75,000 of aid for those projects from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, was able to see at first hand the excellent work that the University of Stirling was doing when she visited Mzuzu University in 2006.

Kirkcaldy's Adam Smith College heads up Scotland's Colleges International, a conglomerate of Scottish colleges working with senior staff and college principals to increase leadership skills in Malawi. I gather that about 30 Malawian students have graduated from the programme. As part of the graduation celebrations, a fundraising event was held at Adam Smith College, which raised £5,500, all of which went towards helping more young Malawians to attend college. I understand that David Astill from Adam Smith College met members of the delegation that went to Malawi in February on a CPA-sponsored trip.

The Scottish Agricultural College in Perth is teaching Malawian students the critical aspects of dairy production, as local dairy knowledge is limited without western help. It is hoped that Perth's expertise will help Malawian farmers to increase the yield of high-quality milk in the country.

There are too many on-going educational projects to mention. One that is particularly close to my heart—as a former journalist—is the International Network of Street Papers foundation project, which trains people who are homeless to write, edit, print and sell a daily newspaper on the streets of Blantyre, Malawi. That sounds like a significant advance on what seems to be happening in the newspaper industry in this country.

Malawi is the only country with which Scotland has entered into a twinning relationship, so it is appropriate that the major share of our limited international development fund goes to Malawi. I hope that lessons learned and aid projects fulfilled in Malawi will allow us to extend that work into neighbouring sub-Saharan African countries such as Zambia and Mozambique. Of course, education is a two-way street. I am delighted to say that I now have a parliamentary twin in Malawi. He is a member of the ruling party in the Malawian Parliament—an experience about which, I am sure, he has much to teach this member of the Scottish Parliament. His name is Chiku John Hiwa, he is married to Eldys and he has a daughter, Zaithwa Rose Hitha. Twinning of local members will be of considerable mutual benefit. I look forward to meeting Chiku John Hiwa on some future occasion; we are already in touch by e-mail.

As the minister indicated, it is not helpful either to the people of Malawi or to those from the Department for International Development and Scotland who have invested considerable energy, faith and political capital in promoting the cause of Malawi, one of the world's poorest nations, when one reads that the President has spent some £9 million on a private aircraft. However, that and the human rights issues that the minister addressed and to which Iain Smith referred should not be allowed to undermine or belittle the overall good that has come to Malawi through the co-operation agreement. The model that Scotland has pursued of funding deserving schemes and projects and, in particular, of educating Malawians to help themselves is the right one.

15:23

Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): This is a debate in which to enjoy and celebrate success. I was born in Africa—in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia—so Africa is in my blood. I was delighted to go twice to Malawi from the Scottish Parliament. I told the first of those delegations, “Once you go, you will just have to go back.” I am sure that Karen Gillon and Michael Matheson would agree, as they have been back several times. Africa is a poor place in so many ways, but what it has in abundance is joy. Whoever and wherever they are, and whatever their circumstances, Africans

always seem to be happy—always smiling and glad to see you, to meet you and to get to know you.

We have Jack McConnell to thank for what has been achieved, because it was he who decided to re-establish and improve the relationship between Scotland and Malawi by starting a fund to help in Africa, mainly in Malawi. The aim of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Scotland's visit was to establish links, to look at projects and to see how we could help. I am sure that members of that first delegation had no idea what they would encounter. It was all too depressing, and all of us saw the mammoth task that Malawi faced.

Two constituents, Anne Findlay and Graeme Walker, asked me to visit a maternity hospital called Bottom. At the time, it was probably the most depressing place that I had ever been in. It was run by Dr Tarek Meguid, an Egyptian, who had a vision of building a new hospital. That is about to happen. While I was in Malawi, a civil servant said to me, "Where should I go?" I replied, "You will have an eye-opening experience if you go to Bottom hospital." That night, she said, "That was the worst experience of my life." I said, "Yes, but it was certainly eye-opening, wasn't it?" As a result, Jack McConnell and his wife went to visit the hospital. Maybe Jack will confirm this, but I heard that, as they left, his wife turned to him and said, "God help you, Jack, you've got to do something about this place."

After that visit, Graeme Walker and midwives got funding from the Scottish Parliament for the advanced life support in obstetrics—ALSO—programme. At the time, the infant mortality rate was 103.32 deaths per 1,000 births. Given the population and birth rate, that meant that 5,172 babies died at birth.

Jack McConnell was much criticised for his involvement. He was told, "The issue is not devolved; it is Westminster and DFID's problem." We are all glad that he ignored those comments. The result is that many projects have started in Malawi. Ted Brocklebank talked about many projects and I am sure that other members will talk about, for example, projects that help AIDS victims, projects in orphanages such as the Open Arms orphanage in Blantyre, and Mary's Meals, which is funded by Tom Farmer and others. There are too many projects to list—indeed, a search on Google for Scottish projects in Malawi recorded 30,800 hits.

When I returned from Malawi, I thought that I must get involved and help. I kept in touch with Anne Findlay and Graeme Walker and other people. Then I met Linda McDonald and her husband, Iain. Linda was raising money to try to improve Bottom hospital and, in 2006, she asked

me to join the Linda McDonald Charitable Trust—it now has MUMs at the end of its name, which stands for Malawi underprivileged mothers. I readily agreed to help. The focus of the trust is to help mothers and babies. The first MUMs recipe book raised well over £100,000—copies are now rare objects, but I have a few left if any member wants one, or one of the other two recipe books that have been produced. I will be more than happy to take members' money. There are five trustees: Linda, Iain, Anne, Barbara Watt and me. The trust is small and has few people, but a lot can be achieved. Linda went on to produce more recipe books and calendars, and we have all been involved in other fundraising. Linda persuaded STV to have its 2006 Christmas appeal for Bottom hospital and, after Tom Hunter agreed to match what was raised pound for pound, well over £800,000 was raised.

Much happened after that, but the aim was to get rid of Bottom hospital and replace it with a new maternity hospital. A site was found at Kamuzu central hospital, and the Bwaila maternity hospital was started with the money, with the rest of the millions supplied by the Clinton Hunter development initiative. When my wife and I were on holiday last October, we visited the hospital and were delighted to see that the building was up and almost running. It has the blessing of the president and will be called the Ethel Mutharika maternity hospital, after the president's wife. The initiative will at last bring maternity care in Lilongwe into the modern age.

The focus of all those efforts was to help mothers and babies. The most recent infant mortality statistics show a fall from 103.32 deaths per 1,000 births in 2004-05 to 89.05 deaths per 1,000 births in 2009. That is a reduction of 14.27 deaths per 1,000, or almost 3 per cent per annum. I am sure that that trend will continue when the new hospital is up and running. The initiative must be a success.

MUMs is also involved in five feeding stations, where 500 children are fed three times a week to improve their health, and in other projects, which are continuing to receive support.

Much is being done by many people to help the people of Malawi. The projects are positive and are making a big difference. The warm-hearted people of Malawi deserve all that help and all our support.

15:29

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): In February, I had the pleasure of being part of a CPA Scotland branch delegation to Malawi, led by Karen Gillon. It had been five years since I was last in Malawi, and a number of things had

significantly changed. However, as members have said, the warm heart of Africa continues to extend a warm welcome—that has not changed in any way. Although the main purpose of our visit was to establish the pilot twinning programme between MSPs and Malawian MPs, I will touch on a couple of highlights of the visit for me.

I was aware that the Scottish Prison Service had initiated contact a number of years ago with the Malawi Prison Service and was keen to look at how they could share experience and work together on projects. I visited one of the prisons that the SPS has had some involvement with. Father Brian Gowans, a prison chaplain with the SPS, arranged through his contacts in Malawi for our delegation to visit Zomba central prison, Malawi's maximum security prison. On the Malawian side, our visit to the prison was organised by Sister Anna Tomassi, a missionary who has been working in Malawi for a number of years now.

I am sure that members will appreciate that conditions in Malawian prisons are extremely difficult. One report that I read before visiting the prison described it as "hell on earth". Most prisoners spend five years or more there, and it has a wing of condemned prisoners. The prison was built in 1935 and its conditions have largely not changed since then. Sadly, HIV, AIDS, tuberculosis and other conditions prove to be a major problem in the prison, which has limited health care facilities. It could be said that the prison is a little overcrowded. It was built for a capacity of 756 prisoners but at present has 2,134 prisoners. The average prison cell was designed for 15 prisoners but now contains 35 prisoners. It would be fair to say that the conditions and the health challenges that prisoners face place a big burden on the prison staff. On average, one in 20 prisoners a year will die, possibly from conditions that they may catch in prison.

I can recall feeling during the visit that the prison was a rather hopeless place. However, as I went round the prison, it was evident that one person brought a considerable level of hope to the place: Sister Anna. Her role largely consists of going in to feed prisoners, who often suffer from HIV, AIDS or other conditions and who often do not get access to prison food. The intention is that prisoners should have a meal once a day, but that does not always happen if the firewood does not turn up for the kitchen to provide the meal. Sister Anna has successfully set up a rehabilitation centre for prisoners in Blantyre. Her dedication to working with a group who are often so marginalised in society is to be commended—I found it an inspiration. She pointed out that seeking funding for that type of work is often difficult because it is not regarded as a priority.

It struck me during the course of our visit that, unfortunately, the engagement with the SPS appears to have stalled to some degree. I think that benefit could be gained from re-establishing that contact and that work. I hope that the minister will be able to take that point forward from the debate.

Just across the road from Zomba central prison is Zomba mental hospital, where a first-class project is run by the Scotland Malawi mental health education project to drive up the quality of care for mental health patients and to increase capacity in the provision of mental health services. Malawi is currently served by one psychiatrist, but the programme is at the stage at which it is hoped to increase that to three psychiatrists. Further, because of the funding that was announced today, it looks as though Malawi will actually have five psychiatrists—that will be a direct result of the programme and the funding that the Scottish Government has put in place and is to be welcomed. I was very impressed by the quality of the project and its work.

I also had the pleasure of visiting Domasi and Limbe secondary schools, which are run by the Blantyre synod and which have benefited from support from Falkirk schools through Falkirk churches together. Falkirk high school and Graeme high have sent much of their old equipment from previous school buildings to be used in school facilities in Malawi, which has proved to be of benefit. I had the pleasure of watching a basketball match in Malawi at which children wore Falkirk Mod T-shirts, which Falkirk Council sent for their benefit.

The main part of our programme concerned the workshops that we established for the twinning programme. In the course of the four workshops—three were on media training and the other was on the role of parliamentary committees—85 members of the National Assembly of Malawi participated. I was interested to find during the media workshops that all the problems that politicians in Malawi have with the media are exactly the same as the problems that politicians in Scotland experience. Sadly, even with our best efforts, Karen Gillon and I could not give answers on how to improve the situation.

The new twinning programme that the Parliament has established can provide benefits and I am keen to see how it will progress in the coming year. Through the continued engagement of the Scottish Government and Parliament, we can continue to do a lot of work with our friends in Malawi to help to improve situations where we can.

15:36

Jack McConnell (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which lists my involvement in charitable foundations and other interests in Malawi recently and currently.

Shortly before I visited Bottom maternity hospital in Lilongwe in May 2005, it had been described as the worst maternity hospital on earth. Scottish midwives who volunteered there persuaded me to visit and see for myself what was a hell on earth, but nothing could have prepared me for that visit. There were women lying on the concrete floors giving birth; young girls in labour lying next to dead and dying babies and mothers; and flies and garbage coming in through broken windows. More than 12,000 births a year took place in that hospital, but it had no medicines and no fridge in which to keep medicines, even if they were available.

The Scots who had come to help had never seen a maternal death in many years of experience, but they saw several there in a short time. They were so horrified by the state of the hospital that they spent their first few days there just scrubbing the floors and beds.

The Malawian women were humiliated and abused by their circumstances. They were without rights or dignity at what should have been a special time in their lives. Those who needed emergency surgery regularly died on the hazardous journey up the road to the main hospital, which was a mile away.

The few staff—who included the inspirational Tarek and the scary Grace—explained that everyone who came by promised to do something but rarely returned with help. Tarek spoke passionately about the human rights of the women of Malawi and about how they were abused in childbirth, when they were most vulnerable. I and the people who were with me tried not to raise expectations, but I left determined to take action and I was certainly unable ever to forget.

By good fortune, STV was with me; its reporter Stephen Jardine has never forgotten the experience, either. Together with Sir Tom Hunter, Linda McDonald and others, we launched a Christmas appeal for funds, and Scotland responded with its traditional generosity.

Last week, I visited the new hospital. An emergency maternity wing has been built in the main central hospital grounds. The Rose Project and other organisations have funded a whole new district maternity hospital for all the other births, of which approximately 13,000 are expected this year. With tears in my eyes, I saw single delivery rooms—private delivery rooms—posters encouraging fathers to support their partners in

childbirth, and a huge antenatal service with private interview rooms in which women can be asked about disease and infection without the humiliation of others sitting and listening. The transformation from bare concrete floors to a welcoming and relatively modern maternity unit is amazing.

Throughout Malawi, 807 women in every 100,000 still die in childbirth, compared with 11 in every 100,000 in the United Kingdom. However, the numbers are coming down and doing so faster than elsewhere. Throughout Malawi, more than one child in every 10 still dies before the age of five, but those numbers are coming down too.

The Malawian Government has some of the most innovative and successful food production and health programmes in Africa, but there is so much to do that the work of Scottish medics, Scottish midwives and generous ordinary Scots matters there. We should all be very proud that we did not just walk on and leave those mums from Malawi behind, because they deserve dignity and safe health care just as much as anyone else anywhere else in the world.

That is just one project, but it is perhaps the most potent example of the great partnership that exists between Scotland and Malawi. Over the past two years, I have seen great examples of progress and the mutual respect and support that exists between our peoples, such as the work of Scottish colleges, universities and schools that Mike Pringle, Ted Brocklebank and others have described. The fantastic work that Mary's Meals does is now being adopted by the Government of Malawi as an official programme across all the country's schools. People who support training in areas such as midwifery, anaesthetics and psychiatry are leaving behind skills that we have taken for granted in Scotland for centuries but are relatively new in Malawi. I have also had the pleasure to be involved with new organisations such as Pump Aid, which provides accessible, small-scale but highly successful water pumps and toilets for rural villages. It is indeed a unique partnership and I hope that, in this its fifth year, we can find a way of celebrating that fact and promoting that style of partnership to other small nations.

I thank the minister for her visits in February and thank the MSPs who visited too. I again thank the Scotland Malawi Partnership for its hard work and urge the minister to give it every support, particularly in capacity building for co-ordination of the partnership in Malawi itself. I thank Dr Francis Moto, who has just announced that he will be moving on from his position as Malawian high commissioner to London. He has been a great supporter of the partnership over the past few years and will be sadly missed, but I am sure that

he will be replaced by someone who is equally committed.

I congratulate President Bingu wa Mutharika on his election as chairperson of the African Union for this year. It is an important year because the United Nations will review the millennium development goals in September. Malawi has made better progress than most towards the MDGs, particularly those on maternal health; tackling extreme poverty and famine; and tackling HIV and AIDS. The president can bring that experience to his position in the AU.

When he was elected as chair of the AU last month, the president said that, within five years, no child born in Africa should die of famine. He believes that that is an entirely achievable goal. It has worked in Malawi in the past five years, with food security for almost everyone now, and it can work throughout Africa too. He also made an important point when he said that Africa is not a poor continent but a continent of poor people. The challenge for us is to ensure that, by the end of the 21st century, Africa is able to take its place at the same table as everyone else in the world.

15:43

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): It is interesting to hear how the situation in Malawi affects so many people, especially those who have visited. We have heard quite a lot about the human indignity that poverty and disadvantage impose. That is why I am pleased that the committed funding that the Scottish Government provides to Malawi is in addition to Scotland's contribution to the DFID funding from the UK Government. It is targeted at issues such as maternal health—we have heard about the situation in the maternity hospital—education, which underpins everything, and economic development, which is about getting a country back on its feet and enabling it to deal fairly with its own people.

Another important strand is civic governance, both for the Scottish Government, considering its funding for that, and for the Parliament. The interaction between our parliamentarians and parliamentarians in Malawi is hugely important, as is the impact that it has on civic society in Malawi and the ability for people to be heard, to be listened to and to have their say in government. We talk about that a lot for our own Parliament and country, and it is equally important in Malawi.

In any successful civic society, not only is there access to those with power and true participation—rather than what is often just termed participation—for people who are directly affected by the decisions that those in power take, but there are political parties. Any healthy society has

political parties and other groups that people can be open with and part of. They help people to feel that they have a rightful place in that democracy.

One issue in Malawi—indeed, in much of the African continent—is that, as it is a country that is fairly newly independent and looking after its own affairs, it is often difficult for true community politics to be established there. I feel strongly that, until we truly recognise the issues, it will be difficult to move forward. I commend the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which does a lot of good work in that area. I was out in Malawi a few times with the foundation, before I went out courtesy of the Scottish Government a couple of years ago, and a lot of good work is happening in communities there.

Scotland and Malawi are very good friends. We talk a lot about that special relationship and the fact that we have a true partnership. I think that Pauline McNeill alluded to this point earlier: if we truly are friends and have a special relationship, that relationship will maintain through conversation that involves criticism of one by the other. Friends have the ability to disagree and be open about disagreement but still to be in it for the long haul and to remain friends.

There are some issues in Malawi just now. I have not been there for a while and, as Michael Matheson implied, we cannot always believe everything that we read. However, there are issues and there is a responsibility on Scotland to talk about them with our friends in Malawi.

Joe FitzPatrick will no doubt later speak about the motion that he has lodged about the fact that homosexuals are being persecuted in Malawi. That is against the constitution—article 20, I understand—and against the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. I am glad that the minister raised that matter when she was there, and it is something that members of the Parliament should not shirk from raising with our counterparts in Malawi.

There is also an issue with the quota system for tertiary and higher education. There is a view that the northerners in the country are being discriminated against. As an African country that has not suffered in the same way as others have over the years from the conflicts that come from different perceived ethnic identities within the false boundaries that were set all those years ago, Malawi has been a bit of a shining light, and I would hate to think that anything was happening that could spoil that.

I understand that the Malawian Government sent armed police against a peaceful protest by the Livingstonia synod against the quota system in education—a decision by the Government that has since been overruled by the courts, which were

then ignored. I am sure that there is another side to the story but, in the true partnership that we have, we have a responsibility to raise such issues and talk them through without being scared of falling out or damaging any particular relationship.

There are human rights issues in Malawi, but there are human rights issues in every country in the world. No one is perfect, and it is far too easy to spout about human rights and to push forward the individual human rights issue as opposed to the collective human rights issue. It is a difficult balance to strike but, when things are clearly discriminatory and in breach of the international obligations set out by the world, we have to talk about them.

I close by saying that anyone in the Parliament who has dealings with Malawi should raise those issues. The Government should raise them further in its dealings, and I hope that Jack McConnell will do so, too, as part of the special relationship that he has with Malawi.

15:50

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): I feel like a bit of a fraud, because, if I remember rightly, every member who has spoken so far has actually been to Malawi.

Fiona Hyslop: Pauline McNeill has not.

Hugh O'Donnell: I apologise to Ms McNeill—that makes two of us.

It is difficult for me to cite examples, as members who have been to Malawi have done today—I refer in particular to the eloquent information that we heard from Jack McConnell. However, a couple of things have struck me. Although I had not been elected to Parliament when the initiative began, I have watched its progress. Scotland and the UK have had a long and not always glorious relationship with Africa, from Mungo Park to modern times. All too often, we have taken from the continent, and many of the problems that it faces result from that.

It is therefore only right that the partnership begins—as it has begun, in a substantial way—to address some of those issues by putting something back in to the country. It strikes me that there are two ways in which we can do that: the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which works by building capacity in civic government, is the way forward with regard to educating people about the opportunities—I have seen similar work in places in eastern Europe; and organisations such as the CPA and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which Linda Fabiani mentioned, have a role alongside the partnership. In many instances—again, I speak from limited personal experience—it is difficult for those who are elected

in such countries to understand their roles and responsibilities in representing the entire constituency and the Government. That two-tier operation—the civic capacity-building, allied with the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and others—should, by raising the level of expectation and expertise of all who are involved, be able to address over a long period the question of how everyone can participate in the country.

We often criticise Westminster for being remote from Scotland; I am sure that there are also people in Shetland and Orkney who criticise this place for being remote. However, we have an opportunity to knock at the door, even if that means we have a distance to travel, and we know how to engage with the Government and the Parliament. We who have been elected to this Parliament have—I hope—an understanding of how to engage with civic society. We need to ensure that the capacity-building work in Malawi engages with both elements: the executive and the parliamentarians, and civic society. The partnership seems to be progressing that work.

However, as Pauline McNeill and Linda Fabiani mentioned, that does not mean that we should sit quietly when we see basic human rights apparently being breached by a Government. Notwithstanding cultural and religious differences, it is our duty as a country that has worked—and which continues to work—hard on human rights issues within our own communities to address breaches, but to do so in a way that demonstrates to the politicians and those who have concerns how to engage in civil and civilised behaviour in relation to such matters. We had our own traumas, to which Pauline McNeill referred, in relation to section 2A, but we debated that openly and relatively bloodlessly.

We need to demonstrate and use our expertise through the partnership and pilot twinning that the CPA is undertaking. We must demonstrate how it is possible to engage in such debates in a way that does not do long-term damage to the relationships between different sectors of society and between government and civic society.

In saying, “This is what we think you should be doing,” we must always bear in mind the colonial history that we have with the whole of Africa. Our telling people how to do things in their country in a way that is not diplomatic and polite will not necessarily bring the right reaction. As Ted Brocklebank pointed out, the purchase of the executive jet was a little disturbing, but I am sure that people in Africa will have found it rather odd that people here were receiving expenses for duck houses. The scale of the challenge is slightly different, but it is not helpful if we visit countries

claiming some sort of superiority, which is clearly not what we have.

15:56

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab):

Despite the tragedy of circumstances that many members have described, their having had the opportunity to visit Malawi—I am not one of those—the debate has been quite uplifting. Clearly, progress has been and is being made.

Although I have not had the opportunity to visit Malawi, it is a country that is dear to my heart. For more than 15 years, Malawi's consular officer has resided in my constituency, which has facilitated many community links. The constituency has hosted many visiting dignitaries coming to Ayrshire from Malawi. Members will be familiar with the work of Colin Cameron: he has announced that he will be stepping down from his role in May, and I am sure that members will join me in expressing our gratitude for all the hard work that Colin has undertaken to strengthen relations between our two countries. [*Applause.*] His personal commitment and dedication to Malawi have been exemplary. I know from the discussions that I have had with him that he has been uplifted to have witnessed an initiative that he could never have imagined 15 years ago. I know that he is very grateful to Jack McConnell for initiating the work, and to successive Administrations for continuing with it in a way that he could never have imagined.

I will put on my convener's hat for a moment and thank the Minister for Culture and External Affairs for her letter to the European and External Relations Committee, outlining the substance of the visit that she recently undertook. In particular, I was pleased to note the progress on capacity building for small businesses, which the committee was keen to see being developed, following the submission of a considerable amount of evidence during our international development inquiry, the report for which was published in 2008. At that time, the committee received a considerable number of contributions and responses regarding the possibility of a Scottish representative being posted in Malawi full time. Subsequently, we added to our report a recommendation on the matter, asking the Executive to consider that. The Executive's initial view was that it did not see merit in the proposal, but during recent discussions with stakeholders the matter has been raised with me again. I ask the new minister, who I know is open to looking at things again and to new ideas, to take the matter into consideration.

The reasoning that was put to the committee was that it is vital that the resources that are being provided and the projects that are being undertaken can be absorbed in local communities, and that blockages, logjams and bureaucracy

should not get in the way. Those problems should be minimised in order to maximise the use of resources.

I point out to the minister that the Scottish Executive already has offices and officers in Brussels, Beijing and Washington DC, as well as Scottish Development International offices around the globe. Why, in that case, cannot we have a representative in Malawi, with which we now have this unique partnership? We should not underestimate the difficulties that can be faced on the ground, where such an officer could ensure that bureaucracy does not get in the way of delivery and implementation. When people are coming to us and saying that a full-time representative would assist matters, we need to be careful to listen.

Let me raise two other suggestions on furthering Malawi's economy and on sustainability. The first suggestion is that we should consider the possibility of depositing each year's aid, ring fenced, with the National Bank of Malawi in a designated sterling account, from which payments could be taken out to support projects in Malawi. Not only would that add an extra layer of transparency about how much of the money is being directly invested in Malawi, it would further encourage independence and sustainability.

The second suggestion is that some thought be given to using not just top hotels but guest houses and bed and breakfasts, where people would be exposed to the real Malawi and, I am told, its welcoming hospitality. That would give people the opportunity to see homes at first hand. As anyone who has visited the country will be aware, there is a plethora of NGO workers, politicians and civil servants who visit Malawi, so that would be another useful way of encouraging sustainability in the local economy.

I am running a bit short of time, but I want also to mention the school-to-school and community-to-community links that have been set up in my area. I am really proud that ordinary people in the communities that I represent, along with people across Scotland, are contributing in a quite extraordinary way to many of these projects. In North Ayrshire, the local Rotary clubs have undertaken work to raise money for Malawi to link in with school projects.

In addition, St Michael's academy in Kilwinning—which I know Jack McConnell has visited, and which has now been merged into St Matthew's academy in Saltcoats—was one of the first schools in Scotland to make direct links with a school in Malawi. Its link with St Peter's secondary school in Mzuzu has had beneficial effects not just in Malawi but, as anyone can see, on the children in Saltcoats. As well as providing educational materials and sponsoring educational attainment,

they have benefited from pupil and teacher exchanges. The headteacher, Eric Allan, and his staff should be congratulated on all their work in developing those links. Fourteen children from St Peter's secondary school will visit the Parliament a week today, which is a little bit unfortunate because it would have been wonderful if they could have experienced today's debate. Fortunately, with the benefit of new technology, we hope to be able to let them see the content of the debate when they visit next week.

As I am running out of time, I will conclude by acknowledging that although much work has been undertaken, much more needs to be done. As others have mentioned, we need to deal with issues such as HIV/AIDS, the average life expectancy of 48 and the mortality rate for under-fives, which is, although it has halved, still tragically far too high. There are no easy quick-fix solutions, but the efforts of the past decade have shown that a multifaceted approach at local, national and international levels can make a real difference.

The people of Scotland stand ready to assist and the young people of Scotland are eager to be involved. It is important that the people's Parliament—the Scottish Parliament—continues to support those partnerships.

16:04

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on international development and Malawi—although I should declare that I am, I think, the third member to speak who has not visited the country.

The forging of international connections is important for us because Scotland has a long history of going out into the wider world. We have a reputation for welcoming people from other countries and for accepting our responsibilities as global citizens.

International development does not have a universally accepted definition, but in broad terms it covers everything from international aid, to the environment, to education, to disaster relief, to human rights. Sometimes, international development has been carried out in an exploitative way. I am proud that Scotland invests and gives with the highest of ethical considerations.

I do not believe that we should view international development as charity; I believe that it is an absolute responsibility for all of us, as global citizens, to share our wealth—some of which came from the exploitation of such countries in the first place. Today, we are also making a tremendous contribution to global warming, which is affecting developing countries more than it

affects us. So, we really have no excuse. Even if our forefathers had been completely blameless and we had already solved the problem of global warming, I would still argue that it is our duty as human beings to share some of what we have. None of us gets to choose what life we are born into—it is a big lottery and we are the lucky ones. It is as simple as that. Therefore, I am pleased that the SNP Government and the Scottish Executive before it—in fact, the whole Scottish Parliament—have taken seriously their responsibility to other countries, including Malawi.

I am, however, disappointed that the Scottish budget for international development work is limited, as are all our budgets, by cuts and spending on projects such as nuclear submarines. I find it to be somewhat ironic that funding for schools, hospitals and telecommunications that would effectively pave the way to peace is blocked by a determination to maintain deadly weapons of mass destruction.

I agree with other members that Scotland and Malawi have a special relationship and a deep understanding of each other's past and future. It is important to note that that relationship goes far deeper than official levels; it is part of ordinary life in Scotland and Malawi. On Monday night, I attended a truly fantastic concert at the City halls in Glasgow to mark St Patrick's day. There, I met Tom McDonald, the headteacher of Holyrood secondary school in Glasgow's south side. He told me that his school has a four-year relationship with two schools in Malawi and has raised tens of thousands of pounds each year to fund an annual trip to enable pupils and teachers to construct schools in Malawi. Last year, more than £17,000 was raised for the trip, and excited pupils are now preparing for their upcoming 2010 trip. I am sure that the whole Parliament wishes them well with that.

Members will know that I am working closely with Florence and Precious Mhango, who are Cranhill residents originally from Malawi who have twice been detained and put on flights back to Malawi only to be given a last-minute reprieve. They recently won their High Court appeal and are now preparing for a judicial review. I remain hopeful that the British Home Secretary will show compassion and grant them leave to remain before a more hard-line Tory Government gets elected, all chances of a reprieve disappear and they are once more put through the ordeal of a court hearing.

Part of the Mhangos' campaign involved setting up a Facebook group, which now has more than 1,100 members. That attracted people who had worked in Malawi and Malawian people themselves, and it sparked off a debate about human rights in Malawi. One of our arguments

was that Precious Mhango would be in danger of female genital mutilation if she were sent back to Malawi, but a number of Malawians were unhappy that we had suggested that possibility. I worked hard to put their minds at rest that that was not the biggest part of the argument, so we have managed to get their support for the Mhangos. Although it is not rife throughout Malawi, according to the Malawi Human Rights Commission, FGM exists there. Nevertheless, as, I pointed out to our Malawian friends, there are human rights issues in many countries, including Scotland. After all, what is locking up innocent little children behind barbed wire in places such as Dungavel and Yarl's Wood if it is not a breach of their human rights? Human rights issues exist everywhere—Malawi is no different—and, special friendship or not, we have a duty to speak up, as members have said today. Perhaps the special friendship makes it easier to broach such matters. I support the view of Amnesty International that international engagement should include promotion of human rights when opportunities to do so arise.

I have referred to the work that Holyrood secondary school is doing in building schools in Malawi. It is incredibly important that we support education in Malawi—something that the brilliant charity Glasgow the Caring City has done to great effect. It was either Nelson Mandela or Ted Brocklebank who said that education is the key to changing the world.

Ted Brocklebank: Give it to him.

Anne McLaughlin: The more significant point that we made in the case of Precious Mhango was about education. The campaign highlighted the fact that, in many areas of Malawi, women's and girls' rights and educational attainment rank far below those of men and boys. For example, in the northern Karonga region of Malawi, where the Mhango family come from, less than half the girls attend school and only 8 per cent of children who attend primary school go on to secondary school. Males have twice the level of university attendance as females. On the one hand, Precious Mhango's supporters have argued that she should stay in Scotland to complete her education; on the other hand, ordinary people in Scotland have worked hard to increase educational attainment in Malawi.

I will skim through the rest of my speech, as I am running short of time.

The people of Scotland are fully behind our desire to fulfil our responsibilities as global citizens. After all, within two weeks of the recent disaster in Haiti, more than 50 per cent of Scots had donated to the appeal. When that happens during a recession, we know that we are moving in the right direction.

16:10

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I would like to start by saying that the irregularity of my appearances at the cross-party group on international development, the cross-party group on Malawi and the meetings of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association does not in any way reflect the intensity of my feelings about international affairs or my love for Africa.

Forty years ago, as a young man, I worked for two years in a very remote area of Kenya, on the Uganda border. It was a life-changing experience. It took me more than six weeks to begin to adapt to the open and friendly spirit of the Africans whom I met and, on my return, it took six months to readapt to our society—it was really quite difficult.

I congratulate the minister on addressing, at the very start of the debate, the human rights issues that concern us, and for the tone in which she did so. In doing so, she allowed Pauline McNeill, Linda Fabiani, Hugh O'Donnell and others to make a sensible series of observations on the way in which we should approach human rights in Malawi. That approach is quite simple: as parliamentarians, we must support the parliamentarians in Malawi, and their constitution. It is as simple as that and it is our duty.

At this point, I should draw members' attention to my membership of Friends of the Earth Scotland.

In the 3 April 2006 edition of the Melbourne *Herald Sun*, John Borshoff, the chief executive officer of a company called Paladin Energy, was quoted as saying:

"The Australians and the Canadians have become oversophisticated in their environmental and social concerns over uranium mining".

Why is his company in Malawi? Clearly, it is because it believes that Malawi is unsophisticated in its approach to, and ability to deal with, companies that are exploiting its environment to mine uranium and export it all over the world.

The minister outlined ways in which we can contribute to Malawi, one of which was in governance. Certainly we have, in relation to our environment and monitoring, sophisticated governance that is often complained about but which is actually quite excellent. That is an area in which we could give specific and useful help to the Malawian Government, if it were to ask for it.

In Scotland, we do not feel that genetically modified organisms are the way forward for our agriculture—the present Government is quite clear on that. However, Monsanto wants to move into east Africa—indeed, into the whole of Africa—and do what it is trying to do in the rest of the world, which is to control seed production and, therefore,

agriculture. There might be some advantages to some GM products, but what worries me is the size and the power of the companies that are developing the products and the way in which they enter agreements with farmers that constrain those farmers' ability for example to reserve seed and use it again. Again, we have a huge amount of expertise in that area that we can share with Malawi.

I was glad to hear the minister mention the Scottish Crop Research Institute. As a member of the Soil Association in Scotland, I am sure that, if the minister wanted to approach the association, it would be only too glad to assist by giving advice on how to do low-input farming in Malawi. One of the great advantages of low-input farming for countries in east Africa is that they become less and less reliant on what will be ever more expensive nitrogen products. At present, many of the countries are becoming far too dependent on such products.

I was also glad to hear Jack McConnell's speech. I, too, pay tribute to the tremendous work that he is doing. I have about a year and three weeks left in which to serve Scotland in the Parliament, after which, in the words of Tony Benn, I will leave Parliament in order to get "more ... involved in politics". I hope that, at that time, I will be able to give some practical assistance in Malawi. I did not even attempt to go on any of the recent parliamentary visits to Malawi for the simple reason that, having had my two years' experience in Kenya, I would not deprive anybody of the unique experience of visiting Africa, and particularly Malawi, or of the wonderful memories that people carry back from that. We have heard reflections on that experience from members throughout the chamber. I already have my memories of Kenya and I would not like to have deprived any other member of the opportunity to go to Malawi.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I must hurry you, Mr Harper.

Robin Harper: I am sorry, Presiding Officer. On that note, I will sit down.

16:16

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): This afternoon's debate is a welcome opportunity to highlight the work that the Parliament, organisations and individuals throughout Scotland have been undertaking with their counterparts in Malawi. Some of the people who have been involved are in the public gallery. Our partnership with Malawi benefits both parties, and the wealth of support that we have heard from members throughout the chamber today is testament to the fact that the partnership is now stronger than ever.

The Scottish Government's Malawi development programme is vital to improving health and education standards in Malawi and through our continued co-operation we can also assist with economic and social development.

Scotland prides itself on being a nation that is willing to work with and support other nations, and its relationship with Malawi is an excellent example of that. The history of the relationship goes back to a time before modern Malawi was formed, when David Livingstone travelled up the Zambezi river to Lake Malawi in 1859. The relationship continued through Malawi's history, through its independence from the British state, and through the founding of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. The Scottish Government, like its predecessor the Scottish Executive, has long had links with partner agencies in Malawi. Indeed, the Administration has safeguarded the £3 million that is earmarked for funding projects in Malawi as part of the doubling of the international aid budget to £9 million.

As several members have said, we must ensure that the money goes to the right places and is put to the best use. As with the Scottish Government's plan for engagement with nations such as China, a line must be drawn carefully between opportunities for engagement and opportunities to raise real concerns about abuses of human rights. I was particularly pleased to hear the minister's assurances that the money goes directly to projects and not to Government and that she raised human rights issues during her visit to Malawi.

I take this opportunity to highlight a case in Malawi to which the minister and other members have alluded and which is of great concern to members and to Amnesty International globally. Two men, Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, have been arrested by the Malawian authorities on a charge of "unnatural practices between males" and "gross indecency". They are currently in detention in Chichiri prison and are awaiting trial. What was their crime? The two men were arrested two days after holding a traditional ceremony to celebrate their relationship. While imprisoned, they have faced mistreatment and they were reportedly beaten while in custody. Should they be convicted, they face a maximum prison sentence of 14 years. We must remember that they could get that sentence because they love each other.

I thank the 35 members across the chamber who have already signed my motion S3M-5484, which expresses concern about the case and suggests that the Scottish Government's relationship with Malawi provides a unique opportunity to present our concerns on the issue. The cross-party support that exists has been

conveyed to Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, who have expressed their thanks to the Parliament for its support.

As well as the clear breach of the most fundamental human rights, there is a wider issue at stake. Malawi has made many inroads into tackling its problems with HIV and AIDS. The rates of infection have stabilised in most places in Malawi; indeed, they are falling in urban areas, in which the message has been easier to convey. We must congratulate the authorities on that turnaround, but the continued marginalisation of the gay community in Malawi is a step backwards. I hope that we can use the channels that are available to us to seek a review of those discriminatory practices. I was pleased to hear the minister's response to Iain Smith's question on the matter.

The minister's announcement of a £7.5 million funding package for Malawi together with the sum of more than £5 million for on-going projects to support the work of Scotland-based organisations in Malawi in 2010-11 confirm the Parliament's commitment to that country. Individual members and ministers have demonstrated that we take the relationship seriously. Despite any future cuts to Scotland's budget, we must continue to consider other areas in which we can work in partnership with the people of Malawi for the benefit of both Malawi and Scotland. I whole-heartedly agree with the sentiments of Robin Harper and Hugh O'Donnell in particular. They said that the relationship must be mature. We cannot go into Malawi and say, "You must do this because we're the industrialised nation and we know what's right for you." As Pauline McNeill and my colleague Anne McLaughlin said, it should be possible for Scotland and Malawi, as close friends, to have a frank dialogue about how we think things could be improved in Malawi. Perhaps the Malawians might have messages for us about how we can improve our society. If we are working around the world to improve human rights, that must be seen as a positive thing. That work will benefit everyone around the globe.

16:22

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): This has been quite a day for international development. As well as this debate on Malawi, at lunch time Jack McConnell had a meeting about Pump Aid, as he said. There has also been a meeting of the international development cross-party group, at which Father Pete Henriot, who has worked in Zambia for the past 22 years, gave a talk on the right to food. Basically, he said that the right to food is a basic human right. We do not live in a country in which people go hungry, but in many parts of Africa, particularly Zambia, many

people do not eat in a day or eat only once a day. That is an assault on human dignity. The rights to subsistence and to health through nutrition are basic human rights, and those rights are not being properly respected in many parts of Africa—certainly not in Zambia and, arguably, not in Malawi.

Historically, Malawi was part of a three-nation combination, as I am sure Mike Pringle recalls. Zambia was intended to provide copper, Zimbabwe was dedicated to the production of food, and Malawi, which was Nyasaland at the time, was where the people were to come from to serve the other two partners in Rhodesia, as it was at the time. Each of those three countries has had a chequered history, but they are united by a joint history of Scottish involvement through David Livingstone and others.

When the opportunity came to do something in Africa, it was right that we entered into a partnership relationship with Malawi. I slightly disagreed with Mike Pringle's comment that there was lots of resistance in DFID and Westminster to our entering into a partnership with Malawi. I remember that the trigger in the process was Hilary Benn coming to the Parliament in 2004, when he was the first external minister to give a talk in the Parliament. His essential point was that the task was so big that everyone could play their part in taking on the aid burden. In that context, it is as well to remind ourselves that although the £3 million that the Scottish Government contributes is welcome, the UK Government contributes £70 million every year to Malawi. We must take both those contributions into account, as they are both important.

Hugh O'Donnell: Does the member agree that a percentage of the £70 million that the UK Government contributes comes from Scottish taxpayers?

Des McNulty: The member is absolutely right to make that point. The issue is that we are all making contributions to Malawi, which is important.

I first went to Malawi before the Scottish Government's intervention and the initiative by Jack McConnell that we have talked about. I went to help the Malawian Parliament with some housekeeping issues. I recollect that at the time—it must have been in 2002—the Parliament there met only when money was available to pay for it, so there were substantial periods when the Parliament simply did not meet and there was no democracy in Malawi.

That contrasts with my experience on my most recent visit to Malawi, in May last year, as an observer of the parliamentary elections. I found the experience humbling. I was outside a voting

station in Mzuzu in the north of Malawi at 6.30 in the morning, as were hundreds of other people who were queuing up and waiting to enter the polling station to cast their votes when it opened at first light, which was at 7 am. People walked 6, 7 or 10 miles there and back to polling stations to cast their votes and express their preference. The enthusiasm of the people of Malawi for their rights, democracy and ability to express a choice was every bit as large, and arguably larger, than our enthusiasm for those things. The learning process is not all one way between ourselves and Malawi.

I was a member of the group that considered the development fund projects for Malawi in the initial period after the fund was created. I was particularly keen on the idea that there should be genuine partnerships. I am delighted that the independent review shows that the partnership element has been followed through. The approach has not simply involved the Scottish Government giving money to Malawi; it has involved the engagement of Scottish institutions of all kinds, from church groups to universities and colleges, as well as individuals, working together with partners in Malawi to achieve something of mutual benefit. That does not always happen in development processes, but it is characteristic of what has been done in Scotland.

I hope that we continue the ethos of that partnership framework, as a new way of doing things that balances the input and involvement of Malawi and Scotland. Neither is more important than the other and each has an equal voice and level of control. That is the real human rights issue: there are the basic issues of ensuring that people can eat and have their personal safety, but they also have a right to democracy. The people in Africa's right to democracy is equal to ours and they are determined to exercise that right.

16:30

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): This has been an extremely informative debate. There were particularly informative speeches from those who have had the privilege of visiting Malawi and useful contributions from those of us who have not had that privilege. I have not been to Malawi, but I have had the honour of going to Sierra Leone on a couple of occasions to assist with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy training of that country's parliamentarians. Some of the lessons that I learned there were echoed in the comments made in this debate. I will return to that later.

We must bear in mind the fact that Scotland's contribution to Malawi will always be a limited one, as we are a relatively small country. Countries such as China are contributing significantly larger sums than we are and of course the United Kingdom's financial contribution to Malawi is

significantly greater than the contribution that we will make. We are looking to give international aid in a different way from the traditional one. One of the major problems of international aid is that organisations spend so much money on their own infrastructure within the country that money perhaps does not get down to the grass roots. Organisations bring in the transport that they require and they have their own housing and food, which is often imported, too. That does not do much to assist the local economy, and much of the aid does not make its way into the local economy. The Scottish approach tries to ensure that we spread the benefit throughout the local economy, which is the right approach.

An issue that has not been mentioned as much as I thought it might be is trade. Fair trade is important and Malawi has good Fairtrade products, particularly peanuts and sugar, that sell in Scotland. Perhaps we could do more as a country to encourage more fair trade opportunities for businesses in Malawi.

Irene Oldfather, who has just come back into the chamber, mentioned the Honorary Consul for Malawi in Scotland, who was keen to develop a trade office in Edinburgh to help to develop trade with Malawi. Perhaps the Government will consider that further, because it is important to build the economy in the long term and assist trade.

I am slightly concerned that tobacco's percentage share of export revenue in Malawi has increased from 53 to 70 per cent in recent years, because tobacco is not necessarily the best product for the long-term development of the country. I am not sure whether there is any Fairtrade tobacco—those who smoke might be able to tell me.

Civic governance is important and I am glad that we have a partnership on that. I said earlier that I worked with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy on training parliamentarians in Sierra Leone. About 70 per cent of them were new members, like the new parliamentarians in Malawi. It is valuable for us to give them such assistance. However, we must bear in mind the fact that our experience is very different from the experience of politicians in Africa. I do not have people coming to my surgery asking me to assist with burial costs, hospital costs or education fees—it would be inappropriate for us to consider providing such assistance—but that happens to politicians in Parliaments in Africa all the time. For many of them, most of their salary goes to providing direct support to their constituents, which cannot be good for them or democracy, as it leaves them in a difficult position. We need to consider how we can ensure that parliamentarians are properly supported in a way that is appropriate for them,

rather than a way that is appropriate to our democracies.

I want to touch on human rights, which a number of members have mentioned. I am pleased that Fiona Hyslop raised the issue—and the rights of gay people in particular—when she was in Malawi. That is an issue of concern—it is a health issue as well as a human rights issue. A group of Malawian human rights activists recently formed the Centre for the Development of People to fight for the rights of homosexuals and other minorities. That group now says that studies show that because of homophobic legislation, gays and lesbians are being driven underground, which makes it harder to give them information that could protect them from AIDS.

Indeed, on 4 January, Malawian police arrested Bunker Kamba, an HIV/AIDS activist from the Centre for the Development of People, for possessing what police alleged to be pornographic material. He was arrested after police seized the material that the organisation uses to educate men who have sex with men on HIV/AIDS. To be fair to the Government in Malawi, it has consulted widely on its HIV/AIDS strategy, including with men who have sex with men, on ways of combating the spread of HIV in the country. It has publicly acknowledged the need to include men who have sex with men in its HIV/AIDS strategy. However, the draft legislation on HIV/AIDS suggests compulsory testing for certain groups. Gay people will not be encouraged to come forward in a society where they are under threat. I endorse the comments of many members, Joe FitzPatrick in particular, in relation to the Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga case.

I close by quoting an article in *The Washington Post* of 12 March by Desmond Tutu, who said:

“Hate has no place in the house of God. No one should be excluded from our love, our compassion or our concern because of race or gender, faith or ethnicity - or because of their sexual orientation ... But a wave of hate is spreading across my beloved continent. People are again being denied their fundamental rights and freedoms ... Our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters across Africa are living in fear ... this pandering to intolerance is being done by politicians looking for scapegoats ... An even larger offense is that it is being done in the name of God.”

I am not a religious person, but Desmond Tutu said:

“Gay people, too, are made in my God’s image. I would never worship a homophobic God.”

I hope that people in the rest of Africa listen to the words of Desmond Tutu on this important issue.

16:36

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

Like many members who have contributed to the debate, I do so having had the opportunity of

visiting Malawi, which I did some four years ago as part of a cross-party delegation from the Scottish Parliament. Anyone who has visited that beautiful country cannot do other than come home with wonderful memories of the people they met; people who, in the face of some horrendous problems of poverty and ill health, maintain a level of happiness and contentment that we, with our supposedly more affluent lifestyles, can only be envious of.

Malawi is a country with great opportunity. However, for the foreseeable future, it will require a great deal of international assistance if we are to see an acceptable standard of living for its people. In the past, I and my party have welcomed the contribution that the current Scottish Government and the previous Scottish Executive have made in developing a programme of assistance for Malawi. The programme was formalised in the co-operation agreement that the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, and the then Malawian President signed in November 2005. Indeed, it is only right to pay tribute, as other members have done, to the personal interest that Jack McConnell takes in Malawi and to his leadership in developing links between our countries.

Of course, in terms of our constitutional settlement, international development is reserved to the UK at Westminster. Considerable assistance is given in aid through DFID. As Des McNulty reminded the chamber, the total aid that DFID is providing to Malawi in the current financial year is £75 million. Anyone who has visited Malawi will know the vital importance of that foreign aid and the real difference that it makes to the prosperity of the country and the health and education of the people. As a party, the Conservatives are fully committed to international development. That is why spending on international development is one of only two budget areas—spending on health is the other—that we would ring fence and protect from any of the cuts across the public sector that are inevitable whatever the outcome of the coming general election.

The purpose of the engagement between Scotland and Malawi should not be to replace the aid that the UK Government provides or to rival it. Such an approach would simply be likely to cause confusion and conflict with the work that DFID is undertaking. However, we can work in parallel with DFID assistance, targeting specific areas such as health, education, sustainable economic development and civil governance and society.

As we have heard during the debate, a great deal of good work is going on. In his speech, Ted Brocklebank reminded us of the partnerships that are being developed between colleges in Scotland and in Malawi, including the successful series of

training seminars that staff from Scottish colleges are providing. That is exactly the sort of good work that we should be promoting, sharing good practice with our colleagues in Malawi.

That is not to say that we should not recognise that there are issues in Malawi with which we should be trying to assist. Aid to Malawi from the UK Government has been cut this year because of concerns about the purchase by the Malawi Government of a new presidential jet, at a cost of more than \$13 million. If we give aid to another country, it is only right that we should expect that aid to be properly spent and accounted for. Given the poverty that exists in Malawi, it is impossible to see how the Government there can justify the purchase of a presidential jet when there are so many other priorities.

As the minister acknowledged at the start of the debate—and as many members have indicated—there remain concerns about civil liberties in Malawi. Joe FitzPatrick and Iain Smith were right to refer to the problems that the gay community in that country faces. However, concerns about civil liberties go beyond those issues. I am grateful to Friends of the Earth Scotland for drawing our attention to a number of other matters. A new police bill that allows police to search without a court warrant appears to be targeted at members of Opposition parties. It mirrors similar legislation that was introduced by Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and may be indicative of a worrying trend towards authoritarian government. The President has taken new powers to decide the timing of local government elections, and there is evidence of harassment of NGO leaders who are outspoken against Government policy. None of those developments should be tolerated in a liberal democracy. If we give aid to Malawi, we have a right to expect that our views on civil liberties will be respected in return.

Currently, Malawi holds the position of chair of the African Union, which puts it in a position of great influence on the continent. That puts Scotland in a strong position to influence the African agenda; in particular, it gives us the opportunity to highlight our concerns about human rights abuses across the continent and on-going conflicts in countries such as the Sudan and the Congo. I hope that Malawi will provide leadership for the continent and that the Scottish Government will use its position of influence to ensure that there is progress on those issues. I welcome the minister's comments on that point at the start of the debate. Of course we should recognise that when dealing with Malawi, we are dealing with a distinct and different culture. When raising our concerns, we need to be conscious of those cultural differences, but that should not prevent us from taking a stand.

I am sure that even those members who have not had the opportunity to visit Malawi agree that our on-going programme of engagement as a country and as a Parliament is of great value. I know from first-hand experience that it makes a real difference to the lives of people in Malawi, but I hope that we can use our influences with the Malawian Government to ensure good governance and the protection of civil liberties in Malawi, so that the people of that country can continue to see real benefits from our engagement.

16:42

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I stand before members as a self-confessed Malawi addict, having grown to love the country and especially its people over the past five years. Malawi is renowned internationally both for its extreme poverty and for the scourge of the AIDS pandemic that has ravaged a generation, left countless children orphaned and crushed family members under the strain of providing for those who are left behind. However, Malawi lives up to the name “The Warm Heart of Africa”: the great spirit of hospitality, resilience and good humour with which its people face such challenges is clear to see and exceptionally humbling.

Many members have seen at first hand the huge impact that our relationship with Malawi is having in enabling that country to meet some of the immense challenges that it faces. As other members have said, it is a two-way relationship. Personally and as a Parliament we have learned, from our Malawian counterparts and from the inspiring communities and projects that we have visited, much about the importance of community action, the place of hospitality and how to negotiate the balance between respecting cultural traditions and welcoming emerging contemporary practices.

Michael Matheson and Jack McConnell spoke about two inspirational projects that are on very different scales. Michael Matheson described the humbling work in Zomba central prison of Sister Anna—a woman who is doing an amazing job in very challenging circumstances, with humility but little financial support—and Jack McConnell spoke about the transformation of maternal health at Bottom hospital, which is a huge project with huge revenues that will bring real benefit to hundreds of thousands of women. Another such project is Mary's Meals.

Education is, without doubt, one of the fundamental human rights. It is one of the key ways in which individuals, communities and nations develop and move out of poverty. In Malawi, as Pauline McNeill said, class sizes are significant. That was brought home to me when I visited a school and found the overcrowding and

lack of resources and teachers hard to comprehend. With the best will in the world, a headteacher who has a teaching staff of eight will struggle to ensure that a school that has well over 1,000 pupils meets its learning targets. Pupils often fail to complete their school certificate, which limits their prospects. Gender inequality, particularly in secondary and tertiary education, means that there is still a bias against girls.

On top of that, there is a cohort of pupils who walk many miles to get to school. Some of those pupils will have had little, if anything, to eat or drink. As a result, the children struggle to absorb and retain information. They are susceptible to illness and they often leave school early. In February, the delegation visited a school in the Limbe district. We arrived just before 9 am and were taken round to the back of the school, where 25 women were stirring porridge on huge stoves over piles of wood. The women were all volunteers and most of them were parents of pupils. They had been there since 6 o'clock in the morning. Michael Matheson and I had a chance to help them: it was physically hard, given the strength that is needed to stir the huge pots of porridge and the effect of the wood smoke on our puny eyes. We then had the opportunity to see the porridge being distributed to every child in the school. The project is run by Mary's Meals and has been running for a few years.

The headteacher was able clearly to articulate the difference that the project has made. She said that before the project started, the children were so hungry that they often went home from school early, whereas now they want to come to school, they are happier, they are keen to learn and they are achieving much more. The pass rate in the school has significantly improved. Mary's Meals is such a simple idea. It costs £14 per year to feed a child. However, its impact is revolutionary in many ways. It enables children to learn to their full potential and to find a way out of poverty.

Mary's Meals is well supported in Scotland. A number of schools in my constituency are involved and parishioners at St Athanasius' church in Carlisle have a weekly coffee morning, just to support the project. The project's simplicity is its strength and I welcome attempts to roll it out throughout the country, because I think that it will be a catalyst in changing the reality for many young Malawians in the future.

I cannot not mention the work of Open Arms, which has had an impact on me since the day on which I first arrived in Malawi, in 2005. This year, we went to see the charity's new place in Mangochi, where it works with some of the poorest children in Malawi. The children's mothers have died and many of them are HIV positive. They would have little chance of survival without support

and care. The care that they get from Open Arms is of a standard that they would not find in many places. The project is inspirational.

Members talked about the elections in May, which resulted in a huge turnover of members in the Parliament of Malawi. Some two-thirds of members have not been members of Parliament before. However, despite the limited parliamentary experience of a majority of members, I am greatly encouraged that Malawi's MPs are displaying great ability and willingness to learn from more experienced MPs in Malawi and overseas.

Any Government with a two-thirds majority would face challenges in reining in its enthusiasm and encouraging full parliamentary scrutiny. I hate to think how parliamentarians here would have managed to maintain a degree of parliamentary scrutiny if the previous or, indeed, the current First Minister had had a two-thirds parliamentary majority. That is the challenge that faces our colleagues in the Parliament of Malawi. It is also a challenge for the Government of Malawi.

Such issues were central to joint workshops that we held with the Minister for Culture and External Affairs and colleagues throughout Malawi. Some 85 new members came to the workshops, which was encouraging and, I think, signifies the importance that Malawi's parliamentarians place on engagement with members of other Parliaments, particularly the Scottish Parliament.

Michael Matheson alluded to the workshops that we had on the media. I think that we learned as much from them as they learned from us, and we found that the challenge of politicians being regarded as a very low form of life by many people in the media is the same the world over.

We raised the issue of human rights, including the issue of the couple of men whom Joe FitzPatrick mentioned, and the issue was raised with us openly by members of civic society and by parliamentarians. That is the strength of our relationship; we can talk to each other and can disagree with each other. However, we must do that constructively. As Pauline McNeill rightly reminded us, we were not so far away ourselves 10 years ago. I remember being a member of this Parliament and seeing Wendy Alexander's face plastered all over billboards, and I remember the difficult journey that we had to make.

On education, I went to university in 1985—my uncle wondered why we were wasting such an opportunity on a girl. Hugh O'Donnell mentioned expenses in that regard. Let us therefore not get carried away with our self-congratulation and thinking that we can impose our values on other people. However, we can have a constructive relationship and make changes.

What strikes me about Malawians is that they want the chance to help themselves. They are not waiting and wanting us to do everything for them; they want us to help them to help themselves. Our partnership is about helping Malawians to help themselves, but it is also about Malawians helping us so that we can learn more about who we are and about how climate change and fair trade impact on the poorest people in the world. If we get this relationship right, both our countries will benefit significantly in the generations ahead. I welcome this debate and look forward to my children growing up in a world that is more equal and in which their Malawian friends are more equal. I thank the Government for what it is doing in that regard.

16:52

Fiona Hyslop: I am grateful to all those who have contributed to the debate. It is clear that Malawi remains high on the agenda in Scotland and that the Scottish Government's engagement continues to achieve cross-party support. We have heard thoughtful, reflective, challenging and engaging contributions with new ideas and, indeed, recent insights. They were very valuable contributions that inform our on-going understanding of Malawi—"The Warm Heart of Africa".

It was interesting to hear accounts of members' experiences as well as of the activities and initiatives that are taking place in constituencies across Scotland. In particular, I pay tribute to Jack McConnell for his previous work and, indeed, for his excellent speech. He reminded us of the passion that informs and continues to drive his determination.

Ted Brocklebank mentioned, in particular, Montfort College and the International Network of Street Papers foundation project, involving the Big Issue. I had the pleasure of visiting both those projects. There is inspirational work in the college in recognising the importance of education and in enhancing the educational prospects and opportunities for achievement for blind Malawians through co-operative computer work, with the support of the University of Strathclyde in particular, which was gratifying to see. The Big Issue initiative in Blantyre is an interesting one, which was expanded to include Lilongwe in January.

One of the most reflective speeches was that of Michael Matheson, in which he talked about issues that prisoners in Malawi face and about mental health issues. Some of those are challenging agenda items, even in our experience in Scotland. However, they are particularly big challenges in Malawi. Michael Matheson will be pleased to know that we are supporting work on

mental health and on the proposal for training psychiatrists, to which he referred.

We also heard about school links—Anne McLaughlin talked about Holyrood secondary school, in particular. Members might remember that we met a remarkable young woman from that school when she spoke at time for reflection about issues involving Malawi and fair trade.

Scotland has lots more to offer in terms of skills, knowledge and expertise. However, as Pauline McNeill and Karen Gillon said, we have a lot to learn. Having a different perspective is important to us as, in devolution terms, a developing new democracy.

The people of Scotland are clearly and genuinely willing to become more involved. Our people-to-people approach is unique: it makes the difference and will continue to do so. However, with that willingness comes a responsibility to act appropriately.

We pay tribute to the medics and midwives. The impact on tackling child and infant mortality in particular has been remarkable. We have also heard about improvements in the maternal mortality rate. I reassure members that I discussed that with Malawi's health minister, because progress is not happening at the rate that people there want. I welcome the improvements that are being made, which have been supported in Scotland, but that key challenge must be addressed.

Even simple issues such as transport must be dealt with. Much maternal mortality relates to the distances that women who are in the late stages of labour must travel. I saw bicycle ambulances and heard about the issues that relate to them. As the mother of three children, I thought that the idea of travelling in the late stages of labour in a bicycle ambulance was challenging, but even such ambulances can make a difference to tackling maternal mortality.

The Scottish Government's role is to act as a catalyst and to influence organisations and groups to focus resources on the needs that Malawians have identified. Linda Fabiani talked about democratic participation. One project that we announced today involves democratic dialogue with women in deprived communities, which will help them to participate purposefully in dialogue with their female members of Parliament.

Iain Smith talked about issues that relate to HIV and AIDS. Progress has been made, but Malawi's average rate of HIV infection is 12 per cent. I visited Chiradzulu district, where the rate is more than 22 per cent. Many members have reflected on images of Malawi. Perhaps the most lasting and testing images for me are of coffin workshops, which are seen on street corners and everywhere.

They are a reminder of the acute need to address HIV and AIDS.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I am very disappointed when I hear above the minister's voice conversations from the back row of the chamber. I ask members other than the minister to keep their voices down, please. Please continue, minister.

Fiona Hyslop: The partnership approach can address the challenges of HIV and AIDS.

We want to support existing links, to galvanise Scottish society and to reflect good practice. Our funding and approaches must have openness, transparency and accountability. Joe FitzPatrick addressed those points. Our work with the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland and the Scotland Malawi Partnership to develop networking and information exchanges is vital. I acknowledge that members have welcomed the £7 million of funding for Malawian projects that we have announced today.

Our relationship with Malawi is not just historical; it is a modern and unique process that will evolve and adapt to meet new and emerging priorities. That is why I had a conversation with Malawi's chief secretary about justice issues, on which Malawi is trying to make progress. We also addressed concerns about projects, particularly in relation to prisons; Michael Matheson raised the SPS issue.

The co-operation agreement forms the basis of our engagement, which must involve partnership. Des McNulty was right to remind us of the mutual respect in that partnership.

We have achieved much since the early engagement with Malawi. The Scottish Government remains committed to developing that special relationship. We honour the co-operation agreement between our two countries and we honour those who helped to forge that relationship. I, too, record my recognition of Colin Cameron, whom Irene Oldfather mentioned and whose passion has been important in taking forward Malawi's case.

In the partnership, we will share ideas and discuss priorities. The relationship is one in which we will not take decisions or action without consultation and discussion. That is the type of development process that we will undertake.

An important point is that Scotland's reach, influence, trust and affection will not necessarily be measured by the amount of money and investment, because they go well beyond that. Points have been made about the influence of Malawi's president as the chair of the African Union—I have raised that with the UK Government

in the past few days. We must engage positively and constructively on that and on some of the infrastructure and development issues to which Robin Harper referred.

We are at an exciting and pivotal stage and we have many new ideas and concepts to take forward. We want to make progress in the relationship, on which we have had time to reflect. We have a country-to-country relationship with Malawi, but its strength is that it is also a people-to-people relationship. The passion, commitment and determination to forge and develop that relationship have been reflected in today's excellent debate.

Points of Order

17:00

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Has the First Minister requested an opportunity to correct the erroneous statement that he made in the chamber this morning regarding my conduct and that of my colleague Bill Aitken as conveners of the Equal Opportunities Committee and the Justice Committee respectively? It is the first—

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Mrs Mitchell, I am sorry to stop you, but I made the point this morning that that is not a legitimate point of order. I stick to that ruling and, unless you have a genuine point of order, I ask you to stop.

Margaret Mitchell: I believe that there is a genuine point of order at the end of this, Presiding Officer.

The first duty of any convener of a committee of this Parliament is to ensure that the committee's business is conducted efficiently and effectively, and that witnesses are treated with courtesy. That being the case, as soon as it was established that the industrial action would go ahead on 9 March, it was necessary to assess the potential implications of that on committee business that was scheduled for that day.

I duly did that as convener of the Equal Opportunities Committee and established that it would be possible for the committee meeting to go ahead with a clerking team, albeit not with the regular staff, and that a number of witnesses were due to attend the meeting on 9 March and would be seriously inconvenienced if it turned out that the meeting was not quorate. Although I would have been happy to proceed with the committee meeting, it became clear from discussions with committee members that, should a committee meeting be held on 9 March, it would not be quorate. In light of that, a meeting was held this week.

It is fundamentally important that the business of the Parliament is not disrupted by those who were elected to serve. I trust that, in view of the information that I have provided to the Parliament, the First Minister will retract his comments regarding me and my colleague Bill Aitken and that he now accepts that there was not a whit of difference between my stance on the matter and Annabel Goldie's in ensuring that the conduct of committee business that is affected by future similar action is not frustrated by the non-attendance of committee members.

The Presiding Officer: You seem to have made a point, but it is certainly not a point of order, Mrs Mitchell.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. What action will the Presiding Officer take to deal with the increasing number of clearly bogus points of order? [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Just what I will do with Mr FitzPatrick: move to the next item of business.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-5984, on the establishment of the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc) (Scotland) Bill Committee.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows—

Name of Committee: William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill Committee;

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill;

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn;

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish Labour Party;

Membership: Nanette Milne, Shirley-Anne Somerville, David Stewart.—[Bruce Crawford.]

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

Decision Time

17:03

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

The first question is, that amendment S3M-5978.1, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5978, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on climate change, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-5978.4, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5978, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on climate change, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-5978.3, in the name of Alison McInnes, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5978, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on climate change, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-5978.2, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5978, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on climate change, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: I did not think so. There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 26, Abstentions 10.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-5978, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on climate change, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 10, Abstentions 26.

Motion, as amended agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the UK Climate Change Committee Report, *Scotland's path to a low carbon economy*, believes that the Scottish Government needs to review its Climate Change Delivery Plan to take into account the passing of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009; believes that there are economic opportunities to be gained from investment in low-carbon technologies and that the Scottish Government needs to take a lead through public procurement, particularly in the fields of transport and construction, and specifically calls on the Scottish Government to put in place a programme to replace its own fleet with low-carbon or electric vehicles, to bring forward the planning and development of a national vehicle battery-charging infrastructure and to enable the public and businesses to make the practical changes required to meet the targets set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009; urges the European Union and UK Government to take action to support Scotland's ambitious plans and targets; notes that, while preserving the environment must not be seen as being in conflict with economic growth, it is vital that current economic circumstances are recognised and that all public expenditure offers value for money to the taxpayer; also opposes new unabated coal power capacity, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to reject plans to build a new coal-fired power station at Hunterston, given that large-scale carbon capture and storage at existing coal or gas plants has never been successfully demonstrated.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-5973.1, in the name of Stewart Stevenson, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5973, in the name of Charlie Gordon, on building better buses, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-5973.2, in the name of Alison McInnes, which seeks to amend motion S3M-5973, in the name of Charlie Gordon, on building better buses, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 101, Against 16, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-5973, in the name of Charlie Gordon, on building better buses, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)

Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 100, Against 0, Abstentions 16.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that some transport authorities have secured better value for money when tendering for bus services by purchasing vehicles themselves rather than incurring costs that include a vehicle supplied by the bidders; further notes the flexibility and efficiency of the five Alexander Dennis Limited (ADL) ALX 300 buses operating in the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport area, which are fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and which have variable numbers of seats in various configurations enabling one vehicle to be used for demand-responsive services, school services and local scheduled bus services in the course of a single day; considers that to the proven efficiency and social benefits of such buses should be added the environmental and jobs benefits of increasing production of ADL's new hybrid bus, which is compliant with both DDA requirements and with emissions targets, but notes with concern that over 900 workers at

ADL, Scotland's sole bus manufacturer, are on a three-day week; calls on the Scottish Government, as a matter of urgency, to fund grants for acquisition of ADL buses by transport authorities and by commercial bus operators to ensure a new generation of bus-build that secures Scottish jobs and skills, world-class bus manufacturing in Falkirk and the provision of world-class transport for the Scottish public; notes changes to the Bus Services Operators Grant scheme promoted by the Scottish Government that will promote more environmentally friendly buses; notes that a number of UK cities, including Aberdeen and Glasgow, did not meet EU air pollution targets in 2009; further notes that poor air quality causes tens of thousands of premature deaths across the UK each year; believes that a bus scrappage scheme, making grants available to bus operators to replace old, polluting buses, would have a serious impact on reducing air pollution and carbon emissions, and further believes that the benefits to the environment and the economic boost to bus manufacturers will be considerably greater if the UK Government announces funding for a bus scrappage scheme in the Budget on 24 March 2010.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-5984, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on the establishment of a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows—

Name of Committee: William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill Committee;

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the William Simpson's Home (Transfer of Property etc.) (Scotland) Bill;

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn;

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish Labour Party;

Membership: Nanette Milne, Shirley-Anne Somerville, David Stewart.

Airdrie Savings Bank

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-5436, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on 175 years of the Airdrie Savings Bank. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 2010 represents the 200th anniversary of the Scottish savings bank movement; recognises that Airdrie Savings Bank is the last remaining independent savings bank in the United Kingdom; further notes that Airdrie Savings Bank was formed in 1835 and celebrates its 175th anniversary in 2010; congratulates Airdrie Savings Bank for its relative success compared with the large banking groups during the recession, and considers that the success of Airdrie Savings Bank proves that a model of prudent and responsible banking continues to work after 175 years.

17:09

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): It is a real honour to bring this debate to Parliament, marking the 175th anniversary of the Airdrie Savings Bank and the 200th anniversary of the Scottish savings bank movement. I am grateful to members who supported the motion and made it possible for us to have this evening's debate. I am sure that we all welcome the representatives of the Airdrie Savings Bank who are present in the public gallery.

I note that the debate is pertinent and highly topical because the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has today published its "Report on the way forward for Scotland's banking, building society and financial services sector".

Several weeks ago, my Central Scotland colleague Alex Neil, the minister who will reply to the debate, hosted a reception here in Parliament to mark those historic anniversaries. I was sadly unable to make that particular occasion, but I understand that it was very successful, with more than 60 trustees, staff members and customers in attendance.

The Airdrie Savings Bank, at 175 years old, is the sole survivor of the Scottish savings bank movement. That movement was founded in 1810—200 years ago—by the Rev Henry Duncan, in Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire. Henry Duncan started his bank so that everyone, irrespective of their wealth or position, could benefit from saving with a bank. It was common at that time to need a whole £10 to open a bank account—in Ruthwell, sixpence was enough. The bank channelled what surplus it made into a charitable fund, which is a concept that remains today in the form of the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland. Many members will be familiar with the struggles that

that organisation now faces, but that is perhaps a matter for another day.

The Airdrie Savings Bank was established on 1 January 1835, adopting the same principles that were established by the Rev Henry Duncan 25 years previously. Those principles have been proven to stand the test of time. While a storm rages across the financial sector, the Airdrie Savings Bank has remained a port of shelter and calm.

The bank is first and foremost a product of, as well as a product for, the community that it serves. Its trustees are drawn mainly from the local community and have no financial interest in the bank's progress. As the bank has no shareholders, it has no need to pay dividends. Its headquarters remain in Stirling Street in Airdrie, and six of its seven branches are located in the Central Scotland region, which I represent, in Airdrie, Bellshill, Coatbridge, Motherwell, Muirhead and Shotts. The Baillieston branch is located in the area that is ably represented in the House of Commons by my colleague John Mason MP.

That local emphasis is what makes the bank so popular with its customers. The bank provides a service that many in other parts of the country—indeed, other parts of the world—may think has gone forever. Decisions are made by local managers who know their customers and emphasise face-to-face service. That commitment has helped the bank to remain stable and profitable while other banks have collapsed under the weight of their own overexposure. To put it in the words of the bank's chief executive, Jim Lindsay, in a recent interview with *The Herald*:

"Sub-prime? Equities? Absolutely not. This is proper banking".

That is a telling statement.

In a debate on the state of Scotland's economy, I was able to say:

"I hesitate to use the term 'sub-prime', as it implies that those who fall into that category are sub-people, rather than unfortunates who bought into the myth that home ownership was the key to their future happiness and who were willingly loaned mortgages by banks that should have known that those people were not in a position to afford them."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 2008; c 12269.]

Perhaps if more banks had been willing to follow the example of Airdrie Savings Bank's honesty and personal approach to its customers, we might not be in a position in which it is the only independently owned bank that is headquartered in Scotland.

Scotland has a long and proud history of banking, which stretches back to the foundation of the Bank of Scotland in 1695, which was 115 years before the Rev Henry Duncan and only a year after William Paterson had founded the Bank

of England. In recent decades the solid base of Scottish banking has been grossly undermined in the name of competition and deregulation, with many banks being allowed to consolidate and incorporate each other, including many of the savings banks, which merged to form the Trustee Savings Bank during the 1970s and 1980s.

The Trustee Savings Bank, which had remained mutually owned, gave over to the impulse to privatise itself, becoming Lloyds TSB, which is now the Lloyds Banking Group—an organisation that is 40 per cent owned by the taxpayer. In some ways, the TSB has come full circle, as the United Kingdom Government is a major shareholder in Lloyds Banking Group on behalf of the wider public.

The Royal Bank of Scotland group is 84 per cent owned by the taxpayer. As a result, through public ownership of UK Financial Investments Ltd, which holds those shares on the UK Government's behalf, public money is being invested in the Kraft Foods takeover of Cadbury's; in the Porterbrook Leasing Company Ltd, which owns rolling stock that is used on Scotland's railways; in a range of private finance initiative consortia that are financing projects across Scotland; and in the preferred bidder for private ownership of the UK search and rescue helicopter operations.

That is the utterly bizarre situation in which we find ourselves as a result of too many banking institutions forgetting what proper banking ought to be. Public money is invested directly in those banks, and little is asked for in return. There is no end to the bonus culture, nor a return to the sound banking practices of old that helped to make Airdrie Savings Bank the success that it is today.

In the past few years, while the major financial institutions were being bailed out, while the UK Government was desperately struggling to press the reset button on the never-ending boom and while Scotland's 300-year-old banking history was being almost dismantled, one port remained secluded from the storm. In the year ended 31 October 2008, Airdrie Savings Bank posted pre-tax profits of £790,000. A year later, the figure was £270,000. That is perhaps modest, but it is more than enough to satisfy the bank's customers and its many obligations.

The bank has invested considerable time and resources in the training and development of its staff, and it is recognised as an investor in people. It is proud that 50 per cent of its staff hold banking or other professional qualifications. The bank takes its community responsibilities seriously, sponsoring a range of cultural, sporting and other activities. In particular, the supercounty champions awards, which celebrate Lanarkshire's unsung heroes, has recognised the contributions of many people to their local communities, thanks to the

support of the bank. It was fitting that the bank itself received a supercounty award earlier this year, in recognition of its contribution to the area.

The bank's motto is "Trusted Locally, Welcomed Nationally". Perhaps that sums up all that can and will be said about the bank in the debate and on the many other occasions to mark the anniversaries that are being celebrated this year. It is 200 years since the first Scottish savings bank and 175 years since the Airdrie Savings Bank was founded. The bank still has much to offer, not just in the important services that it provides to its customers but in the lessons that we can learn about the real meaning of community involvement and the true purposes of banking.

17:16

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate celebrating the success and achievements of Airdrie Savings Bank on its 175th anniversary. I begin by declaring an interest: I am the chairperson of Petersburn Development Trust, and we have a bank account with Airdrie Savings Bank. I give my apologies to the minister and other members, as I will be unable to stay for the closing speeches. Petersburn Development Trust will be meeting tonight so that we can discuss our returns from Airdrie Savings Bank and how we can use that money wisely to invest in further developments in Airdrie.

The recent collapse of some of the UK's and indeed the world's largest financial institutions has shattered the assumption that big is better in the world of banking. The continued stability of Airdrie Savings Bank has highlighted some of the benefits of having a small, local bank that is in touch with its customers in a way that larger banks can never be.

My first bank account was with Airdrie Savings Bank. The money was collected at Dykehead primary school every fortnight, and I was no different from the vast majority of children in Shotts who signed up to the bank's saver accounts.

I pay tribute to the excellent book on Airdrie Savings Bank by Charles W Munn. Much of the information in my speech and, I am sure, those of many other members will be drawn from his book. The bank was founded on 21 January 1835 as the Airdrie Temperance Society Savings Bank. From the outset, the bank had a strong social element to its aims and objectives. The bank's first depositors were the Rev John Carslaw and his family. Deposits for that year totalled £275. By the turn of the century, the total annual deposits had risen to £332,850. In 2008, deposits totalled almost £125 million.

As Charles Munn points out, Airdrie Savings Bank is the sole survivor of a large number of local savings banks that were formed throughout the UK in the 19th century. All the other savings banks merged into the TSB, although the trustees of Airdrie Savings Bank decided to remain independent.

Looking through the history of the bank, it is fascinating to see how the relationship between banks and their customers has changed over the years. The bank's annual report of 1888 contains this wonderful statement on the advantages of saving:

"1. An Account at the Bank gives the Depositor a feeling of self-respect and independence.

2. It gives him real money profit by the accumulation of Interest.

3. His money is always under his control, and within reach of any emergency.

4. The practice of saving preserves from many vices, and promotes habits of industry, sobriety, and reflection.

5. A weekly deposit of five shillings continued for ten years will amount, with interest, to £150".

Excellent stuff. However, I hope that not only the men of Airdrie but the women of the town and of the surrounding villages are now able to make deposits.

Perhaps if some of the failed global banks had used a similarly straightforward advertising campaign and ethos, they might not have ended up having to be bailed out by the taxpayer. Indeed, the words of James Knox, who was once secretary to Airdrie Savings Bank, sound very appropriate when we consider the fate of Northern Rock. In a paper to the board in 1911, he said:

"The stability of a bank—great or small—depends to a very great extent on its ability to meet the legitimate demands of depositors in any circumstances and at any moment".

Wise words indeed.

It is certainly worth taking time to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the bank's trustees over the years. Like Mr Hepburn, I welcome the trustees who have joined us for tonight's debate. I know that the trustees—both past trustees and, most certainly, current trustees—have taken their responsibilities for the bank's stewardship very seriously.

There is great local pride about the success of Airdrie Savings Bank, which is an institution that is truly part of our community. We should remember that the bank has expanded considerably over the years and now has branches throughout Lanarkshire. Those branches not only look after our money but invest in the local community. For example, I know that many schools throughout Lanarkshire enjoy an excellent relationship with

the bank and appreciate the support that they receive for their annual Burns competitions. Such payback to the community is very much appreciated.

Over the years, being taken as a child to open an account at Airdrie Savings Bank has become a rite of passage in Airdrie and the surrounding villages. Over the next century, I am sure that that tradition will remain and that Airdrie Savings Bank will continue to go from strength to strength.

17:22

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Karen Whitefield's speech evoked some memories. My memory of my first savings account, which will be familiar to other members of my age group, is of a wee book from the post office for which I bought stamps every week and stuck them in. I see that Cathy Peattie remembers that. Yes, there was a great sense of pride in watching the savings mount up. That seems to be lacking now.

My savings bank story relates to the Savings Bank of Glasgow, where I got my first ever bank loan. It was for 50 quid, which was to be paid back over, I think, a year. When I think back, what I find really interesting is the absolute terror that, as a lass of about 18 or 19, I felt when going in to justify the loan to the bank manager. It was, I must say, an interesting relationship. I had the feeling that I was entering into an obligation that someone would keep me to, which in a way helped me along a bit, too. That was something very precious and it has, I think, been largely lost in banking circles.

Indeed, I notice that one of the big banks now has a promotion for private banking. When I asked people at lunch time today whether they knew what that meant, I was told by someone who had looked into it that it meant that one could get an appointment with the bank manager. However, one has to sign up to being a very special kind of customer. We seem to be just going back the way. Why do we not just recognise that the baby was thrown out with the bath water and that an awful lot of wrong was done in eroding those kinds of relationships? Certainly, the people at Airdrie Savings Bank are to be much congratulated on sticking to their guns over the years. It should be recognised that they had it right.

The other night, I went to a lecture at the David Hume Institute that was well presented by Jim Lindsay, the chief executive of Airdrie Savings Bank. At that fascinating seminar we heard about the bank's experiences over the years. Another chap who spoke outlined some of the issues over the years, where banking has gone wrong and why we no longer have the mutual models that we

all used to feel were of benefit and promoted responsibility with money and saving, rather than the instant gratification that the rogues of the banking system who came in expected everyone to sign up to.

It is clear that what we had did not work. The philosophy of banks being too big to fail was not true. It is not just the recent banking crisis that has shown the flaws in that thinking, but the behaviour of the financial institutions over the past few decades. The chap who spoke the other night—I should name him: it was Ed Mayo, the chief executive of Co-operatives UK—talked about the behaviour of financial institutions over the decades. We have only to look at the £13.5 billion of pension missellings in the 1980s and the mortgage endowments of the 1990s that all went wrong, causing problems for everybody who had taken out an endowment mortgage on the promise of great profits at the end of the term. I had one myself and remember those promises. It became clear that banks had started acting in the interests of their shareholders rather than in the interests of their customers.

Airdrie Savings Bank clearly acts in the interests of its customers, which is how it should be. Is it time to roll back and rethink the whole banking model? Is it time to recognise that separating investment from savings and having the personal relationships that different banks had with their customers are the right way forward? I think that it is. Those points are reflected in the report that was published today by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. Perhaps we should look again at the role of mutuals and recognise that terming something a social enterprise does not mean that it is of lesser value than something that is deemed to be a corporation. We should stop being terribly impressed by the guys of big business big banking, whom we were supposed to be impressed by but who, quite honestly, just mucked it up for one and all.

An International Labour Organization study showed the robustness of co-ops and mutuals around the world—the research was carried out at the University of Stirling. We have an opportunity to look at different ways of providing money. We should look again at some of the things that we used to do that were to the benefit of customers and society in general.

I echo Jamie Hepburn's point about the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland and the way in which the foundation is being treated by Lloyds Banking Group, which is trying to ride roughshod over it. The foundation was founded on the same principles as those of the savings banks, and Airdrie Savings Bank and other ethical financial organisations still have them. What Lloyds Banking Group is doing is not in the spirit of the

savings banks—it is certainly not in the spirit of Airdrie Savings Bank. I hope that, in the future, Airdrie Savings Bank continues to keep at its heart the spirit in which it has operated so far.

17:29

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Jamie Hepburn on bringing this important subject for debate in the Parliament this evening. I am particularly pleased to take part in the debate because it was a real disappointment that I was not able to attend the reception in the Parliament that was hosted by Alex Neil to celebrate the 175th anniversary of Airdrie Savings Bank.

I was born and brought up in Coatbridge; my husband was born and brought up in Airdrie. Across the huge geographical divide, we both have strong connections with the two towns. My father was a local dairyman and my father-in-law was a trustee of the Airdrie Savings Bank. My mother, who is a lively 98-year-old, is still resident in Coatbridge, where the first ASB branch opened in 1916. Their generation was brought up with a strict code of financial conduct and a fear of debt. Quite simply, they saved for what they wanted to buy and, if they could not afford it, they did without until they could afford it.

That mindset mirrors the general thrift movement that was prevalent when Airdrie Savings Bank was founded on 1 January 1835,

“for the safe custody of the savings of the people”.

The bank took its first deposits when it opened its doors on 21 January that year. Its main focus then, as it has been ever since, was on savings.

In 1924, the bank started a savings scheme, which continues today, to encourage schoolchildren to save. As a child, I had an ASB piggy bank. It was not in the shape of a pig, however. Instead, it was a rather serious object, silver in colour and oval, as I remember it. It took thruppences, sixpences and even half crowns—of course, that was in the pre-decimalisation days, when we had real money.

Schoolchildren also had the opportunity to make deposits in their savings accounts and have them dutifully marked up by the staff who visited the school. That scheme continues to this day and has proved to be extremely successful in getting children started in saving as well as in providing an early form of financial education.

In the past 25 years, the bank has expanded its range of services, lending to personal customers and developing its range of general banking services for business customers. In today's financial climate, Airdrie Savings Bank represents a model that many of the banks that are now

seeking and receiving financial help from the taxpayer would do well to emulate. At a time when banking has become impersonal to a ludicrous degree, Airdrie Savings Bank has endured and flourished by continuing to have a face-to-face approach to banking, providing strong personal service and putting an emphasis on supporting local customers so that, when technological improvements are made, the focus is strictly on communicating with customers directly.

According to the bank's 2009 annual report, ASB, by consistently following a longer-term, prudent approach, has been reasonably immune from the effects of the current banking crisis. The bank will continue to manage its affairs with care and prudence in order to ensure that it can face those challenges with confidence.

In Airdrie, there has always been a strong sense of community spirit and a sense of the need to put something back into the community. It is no surprise, therefore, that this Lanarkshire-based savings bank started its life with a board of trustees governing the bank. The trustees are drawn from members of the community and are appointed to represent the interests of depositors and ensure that the bank is managed prudently and efficiently. As Jamie Hepburn said, the trustees give up their time without remuneration. They have no financial interest in the bank's progress, there are no shareholders and there is no requirement to pay dividends. Any surpluses are, therefore, reinvested for the benefit of the customer.

James Knox's work, “Airdrie—A Historical Sketch”, refers to the stewardship of ASB, which was known to locals as the Knox bank, which reflects the family's involvement with it over the years. The book says:

“It is the proud record of the bank that throughout its long history not a single penny of depositor's money has been lost by investment!”

There are lessons for the UK's main financial institutions to learn from Airdrie Savings Bank.

I wish Airdrie Savings Bank well for the next 175 years and for its plans to expand the number of branches from seven to nine. On its track record and performance to date, it well and truly deserves its unique status as Britain's only independent savings bank. As such, through the ages, it has honoured its motto: “Trusted Locally, Welcomed Nationally”.

That is a winning formula that I hope and believe will continue to encourage saving, prudence and work for the benefit of local people for many generations to come.

17:34

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I, too, congratulate Jamie Hepburn on bringing this evening's debate to the Parliament. It was fascinating to hear the local member, Karen Whitefield, and others talk about their personal experiences.

Part of the message is that we can either learn from history or ignore it. In many respects, we do both, of course. Many people had not heard of Airdrie Savings Bank two years ago, but it has since become fashionable to a certain extent. Local authorities in my area have been to visit it and have studied it closely as if it is an innovative way in which to correct some of the imbalances that we have perceived in the finance sector in the past few years. However, as Margaret Mitchell eloquently said, a consistent thread throughout Airdrie Savings Bank's history, from the outset to the present, is that it is essentially a custodian of people's money. That is an honour but also a considerable responsibility. Other parts of the financial services sector have travelled a long way from that approach, and we in Scotland have had to take our share of the blame for that in the past three years. The custodianship of people's money has not always been seen as an honour. Instead, their money has been regarded as an asset that can be put at risk or, in effect, gambled in a casino-style operation. To our collective cost, that has had to be underwritten by the taxpayer. That is not a sustainable method of banking. A good example of sustainable banking is the model that we are congratulating today.

We cannot simply look back at halcyon days in history, as much as we can look back to the constitution of the Bank of England, which took place at the same time as a third of the money in Scotland was risked on the Darien adventure—it is not, I think, an accident that it is now described as an adventure. A century later, David Hume wrote to Adam Smith after the 1772 banking crisis and asked him to add to "The Wealth of Nations" a new section that counselled against unnecessary risk. In the past couple of years, Scottish institutions in the financial services sector, which was in effect a gift from Scotland to the world, have been at the heart of what has in some cases been a collective shame.

The history has been rehearsed. Jamie Hepburn was right to say that the first commercial savings bank was founded in 1810 and that it was a Scottish invention. Other savings banks were subsequently established throughout Scotland, including in my area of the Borders, where Hawick Savings Bank and Galashiels Savings Bank were created. Later, such banks were linked to the National Savings Bank or the Post Office Savings Bank. They were the repositories of the savings of

mill workers who put aside a shilling a week so that they could afford a holiday to Spittal beach in my home town of Berwick-upon-Tweed. My parents still remember the mill workers from the Borders coming across to Berwick on the train.

What we need from banking—reliability—has not changed. However, it is not simply a question of looking back at heritage. Anyone who had an account with Northern Rock three years ago understands that what they require from banking is a trusted resource that looks after their funds properly. Airdrie Savings Bank has been consistent in doing that throughout its history.

I end by sounding a note of caution. The Scottish financial services sector is one of the key elements of the modern Scottish economy and it is part of the global economy. Nearly 200,000 people are employed in the sector, either directly or indirectly, and it manages more than £300 billion-worth of assets. I and my party, the Liberal Democrats, strongly believe that we need radical reform of the sector. It is not sustainable for the taxpayer to underwrite the risk of the investment banking sector, nor is it right that investment banking is underwritten by savers and their assets. Urgent reform is required.

However, we also recognise that the Scottish financial services sector cannot simply be a network of small, traditional banks. The public expect a more sophisticated financial services sector. They want to use the internet, their personal digital assistants and their mobile phones to access banking services. The essence of the challenge, which has been neatly captured in some of the recommendations of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, is how we can provide what the consumer wants while preserving the essence of the approach that the trusted and reputable brand that is Airdrie Savings Bank has taken throughout its history. We can learn from history because, although the bank is 175 years old, its approach is still remarkably relevant.

17:40

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): I join members in congratulating Jamie Hepburn on securing the debate. We are now down to being a fairly small number of members here, but the fact that there has been cross-party support for the essence of the motion is extremely important, and is tribute not only to Airdrie Savings Bank as an institution, but to the philosophy that it represents. I am proud to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government.

It is appropriate that this is the day on which the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee published its report on the

future of the banking industry not just in Scotland, but worldwide. As members have said, it is clear that there are major lessons to be learned from how Airdrie Savings Bank has conducted its business in recent times and over the past 175 years.

Under the Scotland Act 1998, matters that are connected with regulation of the financial services industry are reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament—although I am sure that that situation is temporary. However, the savings bank initiative is a Scottish success story that has had a worldwide impact, and it still has an important part to play in Scottish society in the present day. Airdrie Savings Bank employs a large local workforce—more than 100 people—in areas that are historically reliant on heavy industries.

As members have said, Scotland has a distinguished history in financial services that dates back more than 300 years. I am sure that, despite the current difficulties, we will also have a distinguished future in financial services. The history of financial services in Scotland is the result of national attributes of caution and prudence combined with a flair for innovation and excellence. Scotland has been at the forefront of the delivery of financial products and services to meet the needs of all individuals, businesses, and private and public organisations within Scotland and globally. It is no accident that the Bank of England was founded by a Scotsman.

The celebration of Airdrie Savings Bank is a timely reminder of the important contribution that Scotland has made to the development of banking. I congratulate it on its 175th birthday, on its success, and on maintaining its independence. It rightly resisted the lure of joining the trustee savings bank mergers. That it made the correct decision on that has been proven through time.

This year, we are celebrating not only the success of Airdrie Savings Bank. As Jamie Hepburn and other members have said, we are also celebrating the bicentenary of the founding of the savings bank movement by the Rev Henry Duncan. I am aware that various events have been and will be held in the Parliament and elsewhere in Scotland to mark that occasion.

It would be remiss of me in representing the Scottish Government not to mention briefly the current circumstances surrounding Lloyds Banking Group and Lloyds TSB Foundation. I deeply regret that turn of events, and the Government is working closely with both parties to try to facilitate a successful outcome. We understand the bank's need to work within tight financial limits, but the impact of the loss of moneys to the most vulnerable people cannot be overestimated. It is hoped that, in the spirit of all that the Rev Henry Duncan stood for and believed in, a solution and a

way forward can be agreed. It was the wish of the Rev Henry Duncan to do something of real and lasting value for underprivileged people that led to the beginning of his savings bank movement. He believed deeply in the dignity of the ordinary working man and woman. Wherever he saw injustice, he worked and spoke against it.

Today, Airdrie Savings Bank is the last savings bank that operates independently. Its original ethos remains strong and, as has been said, its focus on the needs of its customers and the local community remains a vital element. As I said, the bank employs a large number of people—100—in the local economy. In what was historically a heavy industry area, the bank provides opportunities for rewarding lifelong careers. Not only does it look after its staff, but it looks after the communities in which it operates as well as its 60,000-odd customers. I am delighted with the expansion plans that the bank announced last week. I congratulate the chair, the chief executive and the trustees, who are in the public gallery.

I underline Margaret Mitchell's point about the role of the trustees. On a day when the main race at Cheltenham was won by the horse Big Buck's—a name that seems to sum up the image of the banking industry in the UK and globally—we can say that the trustees of the Airdrie Savings Bank are honest and true, not just to the bank, but to the ethos and the philosophy of the bank and all the savings banks that have operated in Scotland—the trustees show that through their commitment to corporate social responsibility. We have heard about the saving scheme for children that was started in the early part of the previous century. The bank is involved in Young Enterprise, it provides work experience to young people, and is involved in events such as the supercounty champions awards, which celebrate Lanarkshire's unsung heroes. The bank also has a role in the financial education partnership. Through all those initiatives and the efforts to find new jobs and industry for the Airdrie area, the bank has played, and continues to play, a major role in the community.

The current financial crisis and the many complex issues that led to it have taught us a hard lesson about the need to understand and effectively mitigate risk. However, we are clear that, in doing so, we must ensure that our industry remains successful and offers the services and choice that customers demand. The Scottish Government has made clear its support for the part that local employers and communities play in achieving our goal of creating a more successful country with opportunities for all to flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth.

I applaud the board, the senior management team, the staff and the customers of Airdrie

Savings Bank and all that they have done for the people of Lanarkshire and beyond. They have brought vitality not only to local banking, but to the local community. Therefore, on behalf of the Scottish Government, I am delighted to support the motion in the name of Jamie Hepburn. In so doing, and along with members of other parties, I wish Airdrie Savings Bank every success as it heads towards the next 175 years and its continued expansion, not just in Lanarkshire but, I am sure, further afield.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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