



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 13 May 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

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

Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6266, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill. We have a little time in hand, although not that much, so members should feel free to take interventions. I will let members know if we are getting tight for time.

09:15

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): As most people know, crofting often invokes tales of the past. Nobody can deny the role of the crofting acts in bringing greater justice for tenants in the 19th century, but nobody can deny either that the circumstances in which we live today are significantly different from what they were 120 years ago. That is why I want to focus on the future. I want all of us to ask ourselves what we want crofting legislation to deliver for communities that live on land that is held under crofting tenure. The Government is clear that what it wants is driven by the purpose of creating sustainable economic growth and strong communities. In relation to crofting, we believe that that is best achieved by having people living on and using the land.

The current system has delivered almost 2,000 absentee crofters—tenants and owner-occupiers—and an unknown number of neglected crofts. It needs reform. That is why the Crofting Reform etc Bill was introduced in 2006, why there was a committee of inquiry on crofting in 2008 and why we are here today.

The Government has brought before Parliament the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill, which will deliver genuine reform. It will protect the rights of tenant crofters so that they may never again suffer abuses of power; place a duty on all crofters, whether they are owner-occupiers or tenants, to occupy and work the land; provide for a democratically accountable regulator that will regulate crofting in everyone's interests; protect croft land from speculation; and create an accurate and unambiguous crofting register that will clearly show land that is held in crofting tenure and provide greater security for everyone with an interest in that land.

I am clear that the Parliament can put crofting on the road to recovery through taking those steps. Indeed, it can make crofting a model for sustainable rural development. The existence of crofts can ensure a permanently resident population in our remote rural areas, which can help to bring greater cohesion to the country, create stronger local economies and sustain vital public services in those areas. Crofts will ensure that our land resource is managed and used to supplement the incomes of people who are resident in those areas through producing food, providing premises for businesses or enhancing the environment of beautiful parts of Scotland.

I do not pretend that legislation alone will solve all of crofting's problems, but legislation is an important part of shaping a new future for it. Crofting will continue to benefit from financial support from the Government. There is a lot of debate about the form that that support should take, but today we want to put in place the right legislative framework for crofting to prosper.

I am grateful to members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, who produced the stage 1 report on the bill. Crofting is complicated and controversial, and finding consensus is never easy, but I hope that we can do that in the chamber. I suspect that the alternative would be successive Governments deciding that, rather than touch crofting, it would be much easier not to go anywhere near it in the future.

I turn to part 1 of the bill. I am pleased that the principle that the crofting commission should be partially elected has been accepted. I accept most of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee's comments on the elections and membership of the commission, although I still believe that the details of the elections should be in subordinate legislation and that the committee's recommendations on possible changes to the franchise underline that. If experience or developments tell us that a change in the franchise would be desirable, having such details in the bill could prevent us from making changes easily. We need flexibility while also ensuring appropriate parliamentary scrutiny.

It is also my view that those who are directly subject to the regulations should be the ones who are entitled to vote for the regulator. That said, we will consult fully on draft election regulations before we lay them before the Parliament. I am happy to accept the committee's majority recommendation that the alternative vote system be used for the purpose of the elections. That will not make John Scott happy, but the committee view was relatively clear.

A lot has been said about the power for the commission to charge for regulatory applications. There has also been a lot of scaremongering, with

claims that the figures in the table in the financial memorandum represent the charges that the commission will levy. That is simply not true. The Government's policy is that regulatory applications where the individual and not the wider community is the principal beneficiary—for example, applications to decroft land or to apportion land from grazings to individual use—will be subject to a charge. It is not unreasonable to charge crofters a small percentage of the total cost to the public of processing such applications.

During the stage 1 proceedings, the issue of tribunal status for the commission was raised. After some consideration, our advice is that the commission is not a judicial tribunal, despite its inclusion in the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992. All that that does is to bring the commission under the supervision of the new Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council, which is right, given that it takes administrative decisions and should follow best practice.

I turn to part 2. The only possible benefit of having a map-based crofting register is if it has some significance. This Government is not going to waste millions of pounds in setting up a voluntary register that means nothing and delivers nothing. However, we are willing to establish a register that has force in law and provides crofters with security in respect of the extent of their croft and their rights in that croft. Some have argued that that is unnecessary. If that were true, we would not see disputes in the Scottish Land Court and we would not have a register of crofts that is so hopelessly inaccurate. Under our proposals, once a croft is registered, there will be no doubt about where its boundaries are and who the crofter is. Through amendments that we will lodge at stage 2, no changes to a croft will have effect unless it is entered on the crofting register. That will ensure that we have an accurate register that provides crofters with complete security over their tenancy.

The Government will cover the costs of creating the register, but it will not pay for the registration of individual crofts. The cost of registering a croft will be directly related to the volume of registrations per year. Making registration voluntary could simply make the register more expensive. I am happy to consider delaying the introduction of the mandatory trigger points, but for one year only. In doing so, I am going partially towards what the committee is looking for. However, the £100,000 that I will make available to incentivise group registrations through providing a discount for registration will also only be available for that one year. In the event that few communities come forward with group registrations, the underspend in that budget will go to the keeper of the registers of Scotland to cover her costs in operating the crofting register in the first year. Given the multiple

interests in common grazings, the Government has decided that it will pay for the first registration of common grazings. Amendments providing for their registration will be lodged by us at stage 2.

I turn to part 3. I think that there is general acceptance that the requirements for crofters to live on and work their crofts need to be better enforced. Some have tried to say that tackling neglect is more important than tackling absenteeism, but our view is that they must be tackled together. We have built in sufficient flexibility to allow for special circumstances—it is important to say that—but the commission must be required to take action to address absenteeism and neglect and crofters must fulfil their duties. Each empty, neglected croft represents a missed opportunity for someone to make a permanent and significant contribution to the community.

The committee was right to point out that the commission must be appropriately resourced to do that work. We will ensure that that happens. Nobody is suggesting that addressing all cases of absenteeism and neglect will be done overnight. That work has, in fact, already started, but the bill will make tackling absenteeism and neglect part of the commission's everyday work and not just subject to periodic initiatives. Processing regulatory applications is a necessary function, but it is through ensuring that crofters meet their obligations to live on the land and work it that the commission can make the greatest contribution to the Government's purpose.

That brings me to part 4. It goes without saying that keeping land in crofting tenure is important to securing the future of crofting. That is why we must take action to ensure that croft land is protected from people speculating on what the value of the land would be if it were put to other uses. It has not been easy to devise a solution to that problem, as those who have been involved up to this stage will realise, but I am grateful for the committee's thoughts on the matter. I think that we all want to see the same result. The commission will have the general function of promoting the interests of crofting, which will include maintaining land in crofting tenure. I agree that there should be a presumption against development on inby land, and I believe that the commission's influence as a key agency in the production of development plans will help to achieve that. However, I am reluctant to involve the commission in individual planning applications, as that would go beyond the scope of its responsibilities and would have resource implications.

I should say in passing that the Government agrees that it is perhaps time that the *Whitbread v Macdonald* loophole was closed. Perhaps some members in the chamber do not know that the advocate who won the case that confirmed the

loophole is now—a gentle irony—a minister in the Government that will close the loophole, which I suppose is a fine example of the old Scots saying that what goes around, comes around. However, I suppose that that is what happens occasionally.

This is a defining moment for crofting. We have to choose between propping up a system that is failing or putting in place a vision for the future of crofting that will deliver growth and stronger communities. I know that there will never be unanimity on that vision. There is not unanimity among crofters themselves. I note that a former Labour minister who was very keen on crofting and who has long since retired is now, I think, indicating that he wishes, effectively, to go back on the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 1976, which introduced the right to buy. However, we are now so much further forward from that legislation that that debate cannot be allowed to colour where we are today.

The principles of the bill will deliver the vision that we have been discussing over the past few months. I commend the bill and the committee's report to the Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill.

09:28

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):

Labour very much welcomes the chance to secure improvements to the lives of crofters and our crofting communities. We believe that crofting remains a significant part of the way of life of the Highlands and Islands and is also economically significant to those communities. We also believe that crofting has a strong part to play in securing the public good, in retaining the population in what might be considered remote areas of Scotland, in maintaining biodiversity, in food production and in landscape and habitat maintenance. We also think that crofting has real potential to contribute to this century's challenge of tackling climate change. However, we know that crofting is not producing high economic returns for its participants and that it needs on-going and improved economic support if we are to retain it as an activity that is largely confined to less-favoured areas, not just in geographic terms but in climate terms. We need to ensure that we get the regulatory framework right, but we must also get the financial support mechanisms in place—the two must go together.

I thank members of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee for their scrutiny of the Scottish Government's proposals. I also thank all those in the crofting communities and beyond who made so many representations on the bill. However, I am struck by the number of times in

the committee's report where there is clearly no consensus on key bill proposals. I know that horse trading is fundamental to the way in which committees in the Parliament work—with good reason—to get to the end point, but it is striking that running right through the report are so many issues on which there is still such division. On some issues, there is a clear lack of enthusiasm for proposals; on others, there is concern across the whole committee about the detail and effectiveness of the proposed measures. We believe that the bill is of marginal significance to the future of crofting and that major problems remain with some of the proposals that it sets out.

Although we can and will support those provisions that we believe will help with aspects of regulation, we believe that, on balance, the bill as drafted will be disadvantageous to crofting. I choose my words carefully, as there are elements of the bill that we think are improvements. However, there are problems: the new financial burdens, through the administrative charges on crofters and the charges on crofters for the new second register; the potential for the new register to be divisive and bureaucratic; and the proposals to extend the rights of landlords to allow them to benefit from croft development.

There is also the whole issue of the crofting commission's status as a tribunal. We want to look carefully at the basis of the minister's statement today, as we are still not convinced about that and want to see the detail. We are also worried about the removal of the Crofters Commission's development function. Crucially, we do not think that the crofting commission will have the right resources to undertake its new role.

For us, the issue of finance is fundamental to the debate around the bill. As the National Trust for Scotland observes:

"Crofting cannot be sustained by legislation alone and increased regulation needs to be matched with a properly targeted crofting support system on the ground. Existing measures to encourage crofters to undertake agricultural work on their crofts are woefully inadequate, especially in the context of existing fuel costs, distance from markets, low productivity in general and the small scale of most crofts. We believe there is currently little in the Scottish Rural Development Programme that is going to appeal to the majority of crofters and this gap must be filled by putting in place financial incentives that are simple, straightforward and properly targeted."

We agree completely. The finances that underpin the bill need to be right.

Nevertheless, our view of the bill is balanced, and there are provisions that we are happy to support. Those include the proposal to introduce direct elections to the crofting commission, although we want to look further at the detail; the measures to strengthen the commission's hand in relation to the refusal of applications to decroft

even when planning consent has been granted; and the action that it will be possible to take against neglect and absenteeism, where that is appropriate. We are also delighted that the minister will take this historic opportunity to redress the Whitbread judgment, as she suggested a few minutes ago.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I need to get on.

Many of us have been on the case on crofting for some time, and we know that there is scope to improve matters. There has not been much time to digest the Scottish Government's response to the committee's recommendations, therefore I hope that the minister will reply to my comments in her closing speech. I will not be as tough on her as I would normally be at this point. We received her response yesterday, but I am conscious of the fact that, because the committee's report was published only on 6 May, she has not had much time to reflect on and digest it. We all need to take a little bit of space.

The process of debating the right legislation and the regulatory framework has been going on for some time in this session—it went on in the previous session, too. I welcome the work that my colleagues on the committee and my Labour colleagues in the Highlands and Islands have been doing in consulting crofters and considering the evidence that has been presented to Parliament. The improvements that we think can be made are not just about deleting key sections, but about making new provisions.

The minister has ruled it out, but we think that the commission needs a direct say in planning decisions that are outwith local plan provisions. I note that the minister is holding out against making the crofting commission a statutory consultee. We support the provisions that will strengthen the powers of the commission to enable it to refuse applications to decroft even when planning consent has been granted, but it is surely better to get the planning decisions right in the first place. There is a real problem in that, if the commission waits until after a decision has been made to say that it is wrong, that will tip the balance against its getting involved.

A consensus is emerging that we should support and encourage crofting community development and the voluntary mapping of each community and its assets and potential. We welcome the progress that the minister has made on the issue—she has put on the table an offer to help to fund community mapping. Nonetheless, she needs to accept the fact that there is real unhappiness at the Government's proposal on the register. We believe that she has not gone far

enough on the issue and we are worried about the remaining issues around timescales. The Scottish Crofting Federation has expressed its concerns eloquently:

“The proposed Register of Crofts being compiled by RoS using ‘trigger points’ would be very damaging and must be replaced by legislation directing that the Register of Crofts held by the Crofters Commission Administration be completed”,

upgraded to include maps

“and maintained by them, supported by a community-led model of township development plans”.

There are issues about the timing, about who actually does the work and about the involvement of communities to make the proposals work. We want changes to the proposed electoral franchise—I was disappointed by the minister's written response on that—and we also want croft land to be protected as far as is practical and reasonable.

To sum up, we read the minister's response and we engaged fully in the committee's work, but we are still committed to opposing key aspects of the bill as it is drafted at present. We believe that the policy decision to equalise access to grants for tenants and owner-occupiers will inevitably lead to more owner-occupation and a free market in crofts—something that the bill purports to act against. It is not just about what is in the bill; it is about the Government's intentions.

We have lodged a reasoned amendment—something that we do not do lightly—because we do not want to reject out of hand all the ideas in the bill. Instead, we want to flag up to the minister the key issues on which we believe major changes are required. Our amendment reflects not just our concerns but those of many key parties to the consultation. We want to put pressure on the Scottish Government to listen to the representations that we have received, and our judgment is that major changes must be made to the bill before it is acceptable.

I share the minister's view that crofting is complex. Many of us, and many people outwith the chamber, have a long history on the issue, and we need to get the legislation right. Our view in the previous and current sessions of Parliament has remained consistent: there is no point in putting legislation on the statute book if we are not confident that there is an appetite for the proposals and that they will benefit the communities that the legislation purports to serve.

My colleagues will set out our concerns in more detail. Peter Peacock will address the detailed issues of the proposals on mapping and the register. The last thing that we want to do is to place a burden on crofters in the current tough economic times and to run the risk of opening up

land disputes throughout the crofting counties. Some of the issues have been dormant and we see no purpose in bringing them to the surface if they get in the way of the day-to-day job of crofters or the work that they do to defend their interests. Crofting communities must be at the heart of resolving those issues. As the committee correctly observes, a community-based approach is to be preferred as it is much more likely to avoid overlaps, underlaps and ransom strips. We are also determined to ensure that the power to refuse decrofting remains with the commission, even where planning permission has been granted. Directions from the minister on the exercise of that power will be crucial.

My colleague Elaine Murray will talk about the financial issues that we believe must be addressed and the need to sort out the basis on which voting for commissioners takes place. The bottom line is that the system must be fair and must be seen to be fair.

A series of changes must be made before the bill is in an acceptable state. Stage 2 will be an opportunity to address those issues. We will not be prepared to support the bill without those changes, so we reserve the right to vote against the bill at stage 3. We will work constructively, engage in the process and continue to talk to crofting communities and our colleagues in the Parliament about how the right balance can be struck. We recognise that stage 2 will be crucial and we will engage in it constructively with our colleagues.

Our amendment highlights the need for changes to the register proposal and the placing of costs on crofters, and the need for the Scottish Government to work with the committee on the recommendations. I hope that members throughout the chamber will understand what we are trying to do and support our amendment.

I move amendment S3M-6266.1, to insert at end:

"but, in so doing, notes the opposition of the Scottish Crofting Federation to the Bill's proposed new crofting register to be kept by the Keeper of Registers; notes that no additional resources are being proposed to the Crofting Commission to administer its new duties; further notes that new charges proposed to be levied on crofters are not supported by crofters, and urges the Scottish Government to consider proposing changes to the Bill and to its policy proposals to address these issues and others raised by the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee."

09:39

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):

The process of considering the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill and agreeing a stage 1 report on it was not straightforward. I make it clear at the outset that the stage 1 scrutiny of the bill was

nevertheless an enjoyable and rewarding experience for the committee and there is much on which we have been able to agree. The single most important thing on which committee members agree is that the bill should proceed to stage 2. I hope that the Parliament will approve that at 5 o'clock.

For committee members, the most rewarding aspect was our visits to many parts of the crofting counties, including Benbecula, North Uist, South Uist, Caithness, Sutherland and Shetland, where we met local people in their living and working environments. We met crofters, aspiring crofters, landlords and factors. Croft boundaries were walked over, livestock and crops were examined, polytunnels were inspected, antique maps were pored over and plenty of home-made scones and mugs of tea were consumed. I pass on the sincere thanks of all committee members for the hospitality and kindness of the people whom we met, and I offer particular thanks to those individuals who were our guides, took us round their local area, pointed out things that we would otherwise have missed and passed on their local knowledge.

I also express our thanks to Derek Flyn, who has been our knowledgeable and experienced adviser on the complexities of crofting law.

A December introduction of the bill meant that those visits took place in the depths of winter rather than at a more clement time of year, but that had its own rewards. Winter visits, with the snow often thick on the ground, helped to disabuse committee members of any romantic notions about the realities of crofting life, albeit that, as I come from a farming family in the north-east, I was perhaps less in need of that reality check than were others. Either way, as many crofters reminded us, crofting is not easy and probably never has been. Crofting is a vocation that requires mental and physical toughness, flexibility, entrepreneurship and patience.

As the committee report points out, crofters also need other things, which do not lie within their control. Crofters need strong and diversified local economies, because few crofts are self-sufficient and crofting households need other income to help to make ends meet. They also need a decent price for livestock, a fair system of agricultural subsidy and affordable local housing. I make those points now before turning to the detail of the bill to underline the point that the regulatory aspect is just one small part of crofting. To put it differently, it would be unfair to judge the success or failure of the bill against whether we think that it alone will deliver a secure future for crofting. As the Minister for Environment said, we should be realistic in our appraisal of what legislation can achieve on its own.

In turning to the four main parts of the bill, as convener of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee I will focus on those issues on which the committee was largely agreed; others will have their chance to express their views on other points. Part 1 deals with the Crofters Commission, which is to be renamed the crofting commission. The bill proposes that the commission be part-elected, with six constituencies electing six commissioners and the Government appointing three more.

Like most witnesses from whom we took evidence, we support that proposal as a welcome injection of democracy into the commission's operation, but our support comes with a few minor reservations or uncertainties. One of our concerns relates to the proposed electoral franchise. A central feature of crofting law is that, per tenanted croft, there can never be more than one crofter. Two or more adults might live in the croft house and help to work or support the croft, but only one of them is legally the crofter. The Government currently proposes that only that crofter should get the vote. My committee colleague Karen Gillon has been very exercised about that point, which I think Elaine Murray will develop later.

Part 2, which deals with the main issue on which the committee was split, provides for a new comprehensive map-based register that is to be held by Registers of Scotland. As convener, I will highlight those areas on which we found agreement. All members support the proposal for community mapping exercises, which I am pleased to note is also supported by the minister. We believe that it would be a good thing if people in crofting townships were encouraged to sit down together to draw up croft boundaries so as to pool all the available information and to make use of local knowledge—the folklore, as some witnesses called it. Drawing up maps in that way would help to deliver greater local certainty and capture that folklore, some of which is at risk of being forgotten. There might also be further benefits, in that the process might help to identify the development potential of underused community assets or simply get some communities into the habit of working together more on local projects.

Members also suggested that the minister might wish to consider delaying for a time the introduction of compulsory trigger points for entry in the register. That would provide a window of opportunity for those voluntary mapping exercises to take place before registration becomes mandatory. We note the minister's views on that, and no doubt the discussion will continue as the bill progresses.

Part 3 mainly concerns new measures to tackle neglect and misuse of croft land, and to deal with crofters who are absent from their crofts. In

particular, it imposes on tenant crofters and owners of crofts the duty to be ordinarily resident on the croft and not to neglect or misuse it. Again, that was a difficult and contentious issue, but for the most part committee members were able to forge consensus on key issues.

There is much to discuss, but I will focus on croft occupancy. Many witnesses, mainly crofters themselves, argued forcefully that it would be misguided to give the crofting commission increased powers to address crofter absenteeism, and that neglect is a more serious issue. They warned the committee against too dogged a pursuit of absentee crofters, arguing that many people are technically absentees but they have strong links with the community, work the croft regularly and are frequently there. The committee fully accepts that point.

We are also reassured by what we heard from the Crofters Commission and others that such absentees are unlikely to have anything to fear once the bill is passed. To that end, our report proposes that the commission should make publicly available the criteria that it will apply to judge when to pursue an absenteeism case. We are pleased to note that the Government has accepted that.

In the end, however, we were persuaded by the simple argument that, if crofting means anything, it means a critical mass of people living on the land year round in sustainable communities. Only then will schools, shops, lifeline services, farming co-operatives and local businesses have a reason to be there. The committee has seen and heard enough on its visits and in the evidence sessions to recognise that in parts of the Highlands and Islands levels of absenteeism are a threat to the crofting way of life. In those, thankfully extreme, cases, it might regrettably be necessary for the commission to take action, and committee members are satisfied that the bill takes a step in the right direction. Our report stresses the need to proceed with sensitivity in such cases.

Part 4 mainly concerns speculation in croft land and how it can be addressed. The committee welcomes the provision in the bill to increase the discretion of the crofting commission and the Land Court to refuse an application to decroft land, even though planning permission has been granted. The committee considers that that will offer further protection against the speculative activity that is contrary to the interests of local communities.

I should also take time to highlight the committee's recommendation on how planning law and policy could be made to serve better the interests of crofting, such as the establishment of a rebuttable presumption against zoning croft inby land for development.

Sadly, time prevents me from explaining to members other matters that arise under part 4, such as the point of law that was established in the celebrated *Whitbread v Macdonald* case, or the controversy around how landlord clawback is correctly calculated under section 14 of the *Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993*. I am sure that other committee members will be delighted to take up that challenge during this debate.

Committee members fully recognise that crofters are an independently-minded bunch, and that not every aspect of the bill finds favour with them. However, there is much in the bill that is worth taking forward. I ask members to support the general principles of the bill and I and the rest of the committee look forward with interest to stage 2. I thank the minister for accepting many of the committee's recommendations.

09:49

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): As ever, I begin by declaring an interest as a farmer, although not one who is in any way affected by crofting or the bill.

That crofting is an island surrounded by a sea of legislation is well documented, and our committee's brief examination of crofting has confirmed that. I thank our clerks, the Scottish Parliament information centre, Derek Flynn, and all those who gave us succour, shelter and sustenance during the inquiry. I whole-heartedly endorse Maureen Watt's comments in that regard.

Trying to get to grips with the nuances of crofting legislation past and proposed, as well as to divine what crofters themselves see as the best way forward for their communities and way of life, has been no easy task. The committee already has a sense of foreboding that, whatever our best-intentioned efforts deliver in legislation, we will almost inevitably be regarded as having got it wrong.

More optimistically—certainly a great deal more optimistically than Sarah Boyack's speech and amendment suggest—the bill offers us another opportunity to reform crofting law for the better after the recent failures of the past. Certainly, there appears much to be done.

First, it is worth noting the name change of the Crofters Commission to the crofting commission, which, in conjunction with the removal of the developmental function from the commission, points at the new, more clearly defined regulatory role of the body. In a broader context, the bill and our committee report properly attempt to address the problems of absenteeism and neglect, and a further likely consequence of the legislation is that more crofters will become owner-occupiers, which I believe will be a good thing.

I will deal with a few of the recommendations in our report. The committee believes that the case for removing Crown immunity from the crofting commission has not been made and requires further clarification.

The issue of election to the commission took up a lot of our time, and my fear is that, after the first election, low turnouts and apathy will be a concern. I hope, however, that I am proved utterly wrong in that regard. Much more important, I believe that the least complicated and most straightforward type of election should take place with one vote per croft based on a first-past-the-post system, and I remain to be convinced that the alternative vote system is appropriate. However, time will tell.

Sarah Boyack: More on that later. *[Laughter.]*

John Scott: Indeed—that will come from the Liberal Democrats, I dare say.

Following the elections to the commission, and given its new regulatory role, it makes sense to me that the Government appoint a chairman, either from within the six elected members or from without, to establish a direct line of accountability.

I believe the proposed map-based register to be a first step in clearly establishing and defining boundaries of owner-occupied or tenanted land. It will provide the necessary certainty in future when used with the register that the commission will also hold. For example, in time it will reduce the iniquity of ransom strips and allow neglect to be addressed more directly, particularly where neglected fences are boundaries. Like others, I welcome and support the concept of voluntary and community-based mapping and registration, and I support giving a limited amount of time for this exercise to be carried out—I note the minister's intention to make that one year only. I welcome the amendments that the minister mentioned, particularly with regard to common grazings, and the fact that she will lodge them at stage 2.

Part 3 of the bill addresses absenteeism and neglect. Let me deal first with absenteeism. Crofting is a way of life that I support and champion—and championed in a previous life in the National Farmers Union—as it has sustained and supported remote and fragile communities in areas that people would otherwise have long since abandoned. For that reason alone crofting is worth cherishing further, but to do that it is essential that people live in and sustain the communities.

The committee debated for hours the appropriate distance to use in defining an absentee, and I came to the conclusion that the appropriate distance for triggering an inquiry from the commission would be different in different areas and communities and that it would best be left to the new commission to decide for each

area—although I note the minister's pragmatic intention to make the distance 32km.

We all acknowledge that extenuating circumstances will, and must, be taken into account for those who are not ordinarily resident on their croft, but it is important to recognise that, if people do not wish to live on their croft and work the land in these remote communities, there are, in some areas at least, many people who would. To me, coming from a remote rural area myself, the sustainability of the community is the fundamental issue, and from that perspective all else flows. Of course, neglect must also be addressed but, at the end of the day, having people living in thriving communities is more important than the problems of broken-down fences, dykes and bulrushes.

To that end, there is an opportunity for the self-monitoring of crofts by developing and building on the agricultural census forms that are completed by all landholders in Scotland. An additional declaration on that form could invite the respondent to declare that their croft was well maintained, that land that might appear to be neglected was in fact being put to purposeful conservation use and that crofters were living in, and were active members of, a community. In addition, it could be used for electoral registration. Anyone who was found to have made a false declaration could be investigated by the commission, which would perhaps also randomly inspect a small number of crofts each year, as well as those whose returns raised questions within the commission.

My proposal would reduce the costs of the commission, which some of us feel might be inadequately funded to address all the tasks that are set out in the bill, and I strongly urge the Government to consider my suggestion. I welcome the Government's cautious welcome of the idea, which must, of course, avoid duplication.

The committee had concerns that the provision on landlord's clawback is far from clear. That must be cleared up by the Government before stage 2. In addition, although we all agreed that speculative development should be discouraged, there is an argument about whether the clawback period should be extended from five years to 10. I incline to the proposed 10-year period, and I welcome Alasdair Allan's intention to lodge an amendment to that effect.

We also welcome the intention to close the Whitbread loophole, which, in recognition of the bill, should perhaps be renamed the Cunningham loophole.

The committee considered the issue of development on inby land, and agreed in general terms that there should be a presumption against developing good-quality inby land. That is not to

say that development could not or should not occur; rather, it is to say that precious inby land should be used only for essential development.

Conservatives will support the bill at stage 1, despite misgivings about condemnation for trying to improve the lot of crofters, in some cases against their apparent better judgement. However, I and others expect the Government to lodge amendments at stage 2 to address many of the concerns that the committee has raised, and I welcome the minister's commitment to do so.

09:58

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): It would not be uncharitable to suggest that the bill has endured a somewhat traumatic birth. If it does not offend, I also offer the observation that the bill's conception was more than somewhat ill advised. However, so infatuated was the minister's predecessor, Mr Russell, with his own sense of empathy for crofters and the crofting way of life that nothing could dissuade him from seeking to consummate that unrequited love. Here, before us, crouches the progeny of Mr Russell's rough wooing of our crofting counties.

I willingly acknowledge the efforts of the current minister to breathe life back into the bill. Although it has already undergone major and, at times, life-threatening surgery in order to reach this stage, it is clear to many of us on the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee that the patient will be required to go back to theatre quite often over the coming weeks. It is for that reason that the Liberal Democrats will support the reasoned amendment this afternoon.

The minister will point to the legacy that she inherited not only from her predecessor but from the previous Scottish Executive, which set up the committee of inquiry into crofting. However, the current Government was free to take whatever approach it wished in relation to the Shucksmith report, and at times it has been difficult to understand why this particular project was spared the fate that all too quickly befell a number of presumably more cherished Scottish National Party manifesto promises.

That said, like the convener, I have found fascinating the process of gathering evidence as part of our stage 1 inquiry. I join with her and other colleagues in putting on record my gratitude to all those who provided written and oral evidence, particularly the crofters and those with an interest in crofting whom we met during our visits. Their insights and perspectives were invaluable. As Maureen Watt said, we owe a special debt to the volunteer guides whom we relied on during those visits. I can say with some confidence that, in my short parliamentary career, no inquiry has come

remotely as close to offering the same access to a bewildering array of delicious home bakes as this one. Thanks, as ever, go to the clerks and SPICE for their detailed work and patience, which I am sure will be tested even more fully in the weeks ahead, and to our adviser, Derek Flynn, who proved to be an expert and affable guide through a hugely complex area of policy and law, not to mention custom and tradition.

No one should underestimate the complexity of the issues involved or the difficulty in achieving consensus on what is to be done. Part of that stems from what seems to be a misconception about crofting. We are, perhaps, all guilty of referring to crofters, crofting and the crofting counties in a way that does not fully reflect the differences within crofting and between the crofting counties. What became abundantly clear early in the committee's consideration of the bill was that the views, needs and aspirations of crofters vary enormously. Although, to an extent, that reflects different traditions, it increasingly reflects the specific circumstances, challenges and opportunities that crofters and their communities face. For that reason, we must resist making sweeping generalisations or adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. It is also why the committee is right to remind us that regulation alone will not secure the future of crofting. While the minister has accepted that in her remarks and in the Government's response, which pointed to the importance of market forces, public subsidy and investment in development, the issue goes still wider. In Caithness, for example, what will happen in the aftermath of the run-down of Dounreay is seen as critical to whether many existing crofts could or would be sustained. In Shetland, the importance of the oil and aquaculture sectors, in particular, to maintaining incomes in crofting households was highlighted. Again, the picture differs from community to community, and it is a further reminder that we should not overstate what the bill can or should seek to achieve.

While there was disagreement within the committee on a number of issues—I will touch on some of them shortly—there was general agreement that crofting has been and remains a critical means of retaining and sustaining populations in some of our most remote and fragile communities. The minister, Sarah Boyack, John Scott and others have pointed out the wider public benefits achieved as a result of a vibrant crofting sector. That is why what we do in this area of policy is so important. It is also why we should adhere to the maxim that the first rule of government is to do no harm.

With that in mind, I turn to some of the specifics of the bill. It is not difficult to find people who are critical of the Crofters Commission, but there was widespread agreement that the commission was

key to safeguarding crofting in future. The prospect of a more democratically accountable commission was welcomed by most; it will help to improve the way in which the commission functions and relates to individual crofters. I welcome the minister's acceptance that anyone should be able to stand for election so long as they are nominated by a registered crofter, but I encourage her to rethink her refusal to allow commissioners to elect their chair. It is right that the Government should consult further on how the constituencies will be made up, and further attention also needs to be given to who will be allowed to vote in the elections. The provisions appear to be too restrictive. The minister must also resist demands by some of my colleagues for those elections to be fought under a first-past-the-post system. In this of all weeks, Karen Gillon and John Scott proved what remarkable political alliances are possible.

Most important, however, is that we must ensure that the tasks that we set the commission are clear and that it has the resources to carry them out. Although the adoption of strategic plans will help in identifying priorities, a number of us are concerned about the vagueness of much of what ministers expect and by when. It is also of concern that, without the necessary resources, the commission may simply be set up to fail. Of course, the key priority for the commission will be to tackle neglect and/or absenteeism. The minister was right not to seek to elevate one over the other. While the picture is varied throughout the crofting counties, few disputed the need for the commission to take a more proactive approach on neglect and absenteeism.

Under part 3 of the bill, it is expected that the commission will be able and indeed required to investigate and, where necessary, take tough action on absenteeism and neglect. However, there seems to be a mismatch between aspiration and resource. All the more reason, therefore, for the Government to dispense with the need for a map-based register and avoid, as the minister has pointed out, wasting millions of pounds. This costly and burdensome exercise is seen by crofters as offering them no value beyond what is already available through the commission's existing register of crofts. Marina Dennis of the Scottish Crofting Federation has observed:

"It is clear that creating a register of crofts under the"

Registers of Scotland

"is for just about anyone else's benefit except the crofters, who are being asked to pay for it."

Moreover, the potential for creating disputes between crofters and within communities was raised with us time and again. Drew Ratter said:

"A crofting tenancy is not really a territorial unit; it is, essentially, a bundle of rights and duties."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee*, 23 February 2010; c 2452.]

By contrast, the SCF and others have made a positive case for encouraging and supporting community mapping. Although the minister has come some way down the road of accepting that and acknowledging the widespread criticisms of the trigger mechanisms proposed in the bill, I believe that she must go further.

The minister has rightly pointed to the large number of concessions that, since taking up her post, she has already made on the bill and I, too, welcome her acceptance this morning of a presumption against development on inby land and her intention to right an historical wrong by closing the Cunningham-Whitbread loophole. However, I hope that she recognises that many of us in the chamber feel that the bill needs further major surgery if it is to command support at subsequent stages.

10:06

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Much has been said about the need for renewal in Scotland's crofting communities, and quite rightly so. It is vital that we ensure that a new generation enters crofting, that crofting is adequately supported and that it is allowed to develop and diversify. Let us be honest. A bill is not a sufficient condition for bringing in anything like all that renewal—no one is suggesting that it is; the point has been well made by other members—but it is a necessary condition for beginning such progress.

In a sense, the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill is a tale of two bills: the draft bill and the bill as introduced. The bill that we are debating this morning is emphatically not the draft bill, which, for very good reasons, caused some anxiety in crofting communities such as my own. The Government has consulted extensively and clearly listened to what crofters have had to say and the bill before us is significantly different in scope and content from that originally proposed.

As members will know, the bill no longer talks about standard securities or proposes that crofters take out loans against their tenancies; no longer asks local authorities to police decrofted houses to ensure that people are residing in them for more than a specific number of nights in a year; and no longer contains contentious proposals for area committees to take on much of the Crofters Commission's work. The costs associated with the proposed crofting register have been significantly reduced from £250 per crofter to perhaps half that—or potentially more than half that, if some of the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee's

suggestions on community-based mapping are pursued.

I welcome the committee's report on the bill. Although in many areas members were far from unanimous in their views, the report provides a starting point for further rational debate. In my view, that means a bill that democratises the commission and puts crofters themselves in the majority. It also means a commission that can sensitively but authoritatively handle instances of croft neglect. The bill must ensure that, in all cases, land is being put to what the bill calls "purposeful use", by either the crofter or a subtenant.

The committee's report will help to guide debate in many specific areas. For instance, the committee's welcome for the principle of elections is a positive step in itself to increasing participation in and engagement with the commission, something that the committee has also advocated.

On the crofting register and the mapping that will be required to achieve it, anything that can be done to minimise costs in this area is to be welcomed. In that regard, the committee's proposals for encouraging community-based mapping are worthy of further consideration and the minister's comments about delaying the trigger-based system for a year to facilitate and encourage community-based mapping exercises are very positive.

However, if the bill is to achieve anything, it must empower the commission to deal with both speculation and neglect, and I am glad that the committee has recognised those points. With regard to speculation, the willingness of the Government and the committee to empower the commission effectively to overrule planning decisions that sanction the unnecessary removal of good inby land from crofting use is a positive development and deals with the infamous Taynuilt precedent.

The committee's report seeks further detail on how the Government intends the crofting commission to distinguish various types of absenteeism in future. That information might further reassure many crofters about what the measures on absenteeism mean for them, particularly those who have had subtenants working their land for a long period.

In at least some areas, there is unmet demand for land from would-be crofters, although the situation differs from area to area. The committee's suggestion that local lists of such people be kept is certainly of interest, although an assessment would have to be made of whether everyone on the list was fully committed to what they were potentially taking on. However, that is another useful idea.

Finally, like the committee, I believe that there is a need to close the so-called Whitbread loophole—or the Cunningham-Whitbread loophole, as it was referred to earlier—which relates to the sale by nominee of croft land. The Parliament will be relieved to hear that I do not intend to take up the challenge to elaborate on that fully, beyond saying that I intend to lodge an amendment to close the loophole. Many crofters have mentioned to me that that would be an important way of dealing with the unnecessary removal of land from crofting use. I welcome Mr Scott's comments about such an amendment, although I should clarify that, rather than deal with clawback periods per se, my intention is to frame an amendment that limits the rights of crofters to appoint nominees from outwith their family. I believe that that is a good way of dealing with some of the problems that the loophole has created.

The bill deserves to proceed to stage 2, as there is now a clear wish for legislation among crofters. We can identify improvements, amend the bill and debate the issues further. However, the need for a crofting reform bill is now clear and, if the Parliament continues to engage with the crofting community, it stands a chance of providing legislation that I strongly believe will command broad support.

10:12

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I acknowledge the presence of John Farquhar Munro in the chamber after many months of absence—it is good to see him back. I know that he has still not fully recovered from his injury and is in considerable pain, so I pay tribute to him for coming to contribute to the debate on crofting. I rather suspect that he will transfer some of that pain on to the minister in the course of his comments.

All the crofting counties are in the Highlands and Islands region that I and other members represent. Crofting is an important aspect of the life of the region. It has many social impacts and has helped to retain the population in remote areas for many years and generations. It also has economic impacts and provides economic benefits to the region. Further, as Sarah Boyack said, it has environmental benefits, such as benefits for biodiversity and for the scenic quality of the region, which in turn contribute to tourism and the like. Therefore, the health of crofting is important to the region that I represent.

It is said that one definition of a croft is that it is a small piece of land surrounded by legislation. That is emphatically the case. If anyone ever wants to understand the complexity of crofting legislation, they should seek election to the

Parliament and get on any committee that is scrutinising proposed crofting legislation. It is horrendously complex and, on some issues, it is still not clear what the law is trying to do.

Many provisions in the bill are controversial for many people, although I acknowledge that some measures are uncontroversial and that others have the potential to benefit the future regulation of crofting. That is why, as Sarah Boyack said, we will support the general principles of the bill. However, we hope to amend it in a variety of ways at stage 2 if the Government does not seek to do so.

The Rural Affairs and Environment Committee had a difficult task. As other members have said, on some of the core proposals, agreement could not be found across the committee, and the stage 1 report shows that vividly. However, there are worthwhile measures in the bill. One is on the introduction of elections to the new crofting commission, on which Elaine Murray will say a lot more.

The strengthening of the provisions to tackle absenteeism and neglect is also important, but I must point out the committee's view that absenteeism of itself is not necessarily a problem—it is only a problem when it is a problem. Therefore, the commission must be given a lot of discretion to work out when that is the case. It should not presume that, just because someone lives further than a certain distance from a croft, that is automatically an issue that must be addressed in a particular way. I hope that we can make that clear.

The other important feature of the bill that has not been mentioned is the provision for the commission to make a strategic plan that would be signed off by the minister and to which, thereafter, the Scottish Land Court may have regard in its determinations. I believe that that will contribute to protecting croft land and, potentially, inby land in particular. The greater powers to refuse decrofting applications, even if planning consent exists, are also a step in the right direction to help dampen speculation, which has caused so much concern.

There are also things in the bill with which I disagree fundamentally. I disagree with taking away the development function from the commission, particularly at a time when a democratic element is being added to it.

I am not convinced about increasing the landowner's rights to clawback. That is partly tied up with the method of calculating the clawback, to which John Scott referred in his speech. I was disappointed that the Government's response to the committee's report did not clarify that. I hope that it will provide more clarification, because the method of calculation will have a knock-on effect

on the policy benefit of the clawback being increased or not.

I disagree fundamentally with the proposal for a map-based register. I see the bill as being principally about improving the regulation of crofting. It is clear to me that a map-based register is not essential to the regulatory process. That is evidenced by the fact that the register could take in excess of 40 years to complete, so it cannot be argued that it is immediately essential to regulation. When the commission requires maps to assist its decision making, it asks for them to be provided. In addition, the commission will update its current register, which has been criticised for not being up to date. It will have to do that in order to provide the electoral roll for the elections to the commissions in future. We would then have two registers, which I believe is unnecessary and duplicative.

The proposed triggers are hugely problematic. Croft boundaries are notoriously complex. There is a great deal of give and take in crofting communities about where boundaries are. For practical purposes, people just get on with things. As soon as we create a trigger mechanism that has to define in law what the boundary of the croft is, which means that heritable rights may come to the fore, we will potentially bring to the surface disputes that need not be brought to the surface, because people living locally get on with their work day by day with their neighbours. The provision is therefore unnecessary.

The fee to register the croft will be an unnecessary cost for crofters. As Liam McArthur said, it will cost more than £1 million to establish the register. That money could be better spent in other parts of crofting. The provision for the new register to be kept by the keeper of the registers, who has nothing to do with croft regulation, is more about title and ownership of land than about regulation, which is where the focus ought to be. I also note that the Scottish Crofting Federation opposes the bill's proposal for the register. For all those reasons, I, too, oppose the proposal.

However, I agree with the rest of the committee that if we were to have a map-based register, the bill's proposals would not be the starting point for it. There is widespread support for what is called community mapping, which I see as a voluntary, community-development process, which may in turn assist regulation as a by-product. I support the call for, at the very least, a delay in the implementation of any triggers and any map-based register as proposed in the bill while, in the meantime, we encourage community mapping. I note that the minister has made some movement on that, but I do not consider that that goes nearly far enough to give community mapping the chance to be successful in the future.

I also oppose in principle charging crofters for regulation. The last thing that crofters need is more cost. We have a regulatory system in crofting because successive Parliaments have imposed it, in the public interest. It is beyond me why we would charge individual crofters to help protect the public interest in the future. Other parts of agriculture do not have such charges put on them in that way.

I want to make a few more points in closing, Presiding Officer—unless you are about to tell me to sit down because time is moving on.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Time is on the member's side.

Peter Peacock: Thank you, although I am not sure that I welcome that.

I want the commission to be a statutory consultee in the planning process. If that is confined to the applications that go beyond the local plan, I do not think that it will be too big a burden on the commission. It is an important opportunity for the commission to comment on particular applications with a view to protecting croft land in the interest of crofting locally. That is another means of acting against speculation. I urge the minister to consider that further before stage 2.

I support elections to the commission, but nobody should be under any illusion that elections will somehow mean that absolute discretion falls to the commission's elected members. The commission will still administer complex law and decisions will be taken only after legal advice has been given, as happens with the current commission. Elections are a step forward and will introduce a democratic dynamic, but I do not want anybody to be misled into thinking that the commission will have absolute free discretion to make any decision that it wants.

The bill can be seen as adding bureaucracy and cost to crofting. If the bill is amended, some of the benefits that I have talked about can arise. However, economics will ultimately determine crofting's future. The bill does nothing about the impact of that, so other aspects of Government policy must come into play.

I support the amendment in Sarah Boyack's name to show that we support some of the bill's principles but that we want significant amendment at stage 2.

10:21

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my farming interests in the register of members' interests and inform them that I am a member and vice-convenor of the cross-party group on crofting.

I thank Rural Affairs and Environment Committee members, including my friend John Scott, and the committee's clerking team, for producing a thorough, balanced and useful stage 1 report. In recent weeks, I have spoken to many crofters on visits to Shetland, the Western Isles and Caithness and Sutherland. Many of their concerns are—rightly—highlighted in the committee's report. Views on the bill are varied and strongly held, and major anxieties remain. This week, a crofter from Kinlochbervie wrote to me to appeal for the bill to be withdrawn. The crofters rights emergency action group shares that view, but it is not the position of the Scottish Crofting Federation or the committee. Others have asked me where the need for crofting legislation came from. I believe that it might have emanated from one line in a long-forgotten Lib Dem manifesto. However, we are where we are, and we must use the rare opportunity in Parliament to make it easier for crofters to run their crofts.

Like the SCF, I am particularly pleased that the committee's report makes it clear that regulation alone will not ensure crofting's survival, as the minister said. Crofters want practical measures that are designed to aid their good work, which is why I have fought hard over the years to retain measures such as the bull hire scheme, to ensure the high quality of crofters' breeding stock, and proper support for croft housing—inflation has eroded that support in recent years. As my friends Norman Leask and Patrick Krause of the Scottish Crofting Federation have argued for many years, crofters need carrots as well as sticks. That is very true.

Many crofters and farmers are concerned about predation by sea eagles on their lambs, which are their livelihood. The Government must listen to their concerns—they would not say that they were suffering predation if it were not happening.

If the SNP Government really wants crofting to continue, it should listen to the practical points that crofters make. I have looked at the list of land managers options, hardly any of which seem relevant or helpful to a crofter's basic needs. LMOs are available to everyone who has an agricultural holding. Unlike other agri-environmental schemes, LMOs are not competitive, so surely it would be just and fair to have priorities in the menu of LMOs that would serve crofters well in practical terms. Crofters might be able to use the options on vernacular buildings and rush management, but not many options are relevant to them.

As we have heard, the crofting register has been a difficult issue. Crofters are right to fear the extra cost that they might incur and the further bureaucracy that will be involved. The estimated costs have been revised downwards, but £130 per

registration is still a significant expense for many crofters—that is the profit on anywhere between six and 10 lambs gone. The SCF says that it is pleased with the broad agreement on its voluntary community-led mapping initiative, which it believes is a positive initiative, in contrast to the Government's suggested compulsory trigger-point mapping. I would be interested to hear more in the minister's closing remarks about the Government's response to the initiative; I was encouraged by her opening remarks.

The Scottish Rural Property and Business Association has said that it is "not convinced" that a new register is justified in terms of costs and benefits. It has made a sensible suggestion that crofting communities should be able to get together to map their areas on the register and that that activity should be free of charge for a period of 10 years from the implementation of the bill. In a previous speech, I suggested that integrated administration and control system maps could be used for registration purposes, but that was before I learned that only between 5,000 and 6,000 IACS forms have been completed by crofters. A new mapping system might encourage more IACS applications, leading to better downloading of subsidies for crofters in the future. That is one positive aspect of the system.

I agree with the committee's acceptance that the commission should continue as the main body with responsibility for regulating crofting. We believe that only crofters should have a vote in elections to the commission and that, at the moment, first past the post is the simplest system of election. Further work needs to be done on the contentious issues that are connected with absenteeism, such as the limit within which a crofter is deemed to be ordinarily resident. The committee is right to say that we need to have a clear strategic plan to address neglect, based on the factors that would determine why an apparent case of neglect would not be tackled.

I emphasise that the Scottish Conservatives remain wholly supportive of crofters and the crofting sector. We want the sector to thrive and to continue to produce environmental benefits for all our people, while helping to sustain local communities in some of our most remote and fragile rural and island areas. I know that in Stornoway, for example, crofting filters through the whole urban environment and makes people who live there aware of the importance of being self-sufficient in foodstuffs.

I point out that the Scottish Conservatives have a proud record of legislating in the interests of our crofters, from the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Acts of 1886 and 1887 to the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act 1997. If the SNP is able in the bill to produce anything as useful as those

acts, it will be doing well. All of us are praying that the bill is nothing like the chaotic Crofting Reform etc Bill of 2007, which was a prime example of bad legislation.

10:27

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I refer members to my registered interest as a member of the Scottish Crofting Federation, in which there are more varied views even than in the Liberal-Conservative coalition Government.

I have taken a lot of advice, and my colleagues in various parts of the Highlands have talked to crofters about what is happening at the moment. I will concentrate on two issues that need urgent action: neglect and absenteeism, and registration.

In its supplementary evidence to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and the Parliament on administrative costs and so on, the Crofters Commission pointed out that approximately 14,000 of the 18,000 crofts are occupied and between 8,000 and 10,000 are worked. That suggests that neglect and absenteeism are a huge issue; if they were not such a huge issue, I do not why anyone would want to approach crofting with a view to regulating it better, to ensure that the problem is addressed. The commission states that potential misuse and neglect "could be substantial".

It is important for us to recognise in the bill that the first step towards putting crofting on the front foot is to ensure that regulation allows us to identify the areas that can be developed and those that are being wilfully misused and neglected.

In paragraph 346 of its report, the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee said:

"Neglect is defined as a failure to observe the standards of good agricultural and environmental conditions set out in European regulations on cross-compliance. Misuse is (to paraphrase) a wilful failure to cultivate the land or put it to any other purposeful use agreed to by the landlord or the Commission."

The committee is talking about dialogue with

"the landlord or the Commission"

and the crofting community. If we are to make progress, we must acknowledge that the debate between the regulatory bodies, grazings committees and crofters has not been adequate. If it had been adequate, the neglect that is represented by the figures that I read out could not have built up over the years. We must find a means of identifying neglect that does not just depend on someone complaining about the neglect, as happened in the past. We must find triggers that allow the commission and others to deal with the matter. My view is that grazings

committees should draw up reports—which could be of a simple nature—annually.

The committee considered a detailed report from Camuscross, in Skye, which contained photographs and identified decisions that had been detrimental or helpful to crofting. The evidence was complex, but it would be possible for local people to produce a photographic record of what they regard as problems or beneficial developments. Such an approach could help the commission in its regulatory duties and, through the elected element on the commission, focus on means of getting to the root of the problems

I want to lodge an amendment at stage 2 that would allow such dialogue to take place. If we consider how we got to where we are, we find that ensuring that the Crofters Commission is doing something useful under the existing laws has been a strikingly low priority for Governments. People have said that if the commission had carried through the work that it had been given to do we would not need to take further steps. The commission has not done that, and part of the reason for that is that its work has not been given high priority at political level. In the context of crofting's future, not telling the commission to get its work done was a shocking dereliction of duty.

The supplementary evidence from the commission shows that it will require much more money if it is to be able to process the cases that we are talking about. It is therefore incumbent on members of all parties to ensure that the bill provides an opportunity to deal with many issues that have been shamefully neglected by all Governments.

Croft mapping is a key part of ensuring that we regulate properly. During the arguments about land reform during and after the 1990s, the idea of a map-based register of the land of Scotland was central to ensuring that we understood who owns the land and could discuss how it could be used. Shucksmith said that we need a map-based register of crofts. The approach must be legally valid and must be able to deal not just with registration when people change the use of crofts but with decisions about where boundaries are.

Labour Party members suggested today that we should not turn over stones that should not be turned over. That is not the way to take crofting forward. Oversight by Government is bringing to the issue the potential for regulation that could allow us to move into a new era in crofting, by rooting out neglect. The fundamental issue of land use is at the root of crofting, and crofting communities cannot be supported unless the land is properly used.

If Scottish taxpayers are to support the regulation of crofting, surely they have a right to

demand that the land be better used. There are far too many examples of the land not being used properly, which is why we must ensure that as it continues its work on the bill the committee acknowledges that issues have been neglected at Government level. Crofting will benefit enormously if we take the regulatory steps that are set out in the proposals.

10:35

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in this stage 1 debate on the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill. The process to get to this stage has been fascinating, not least because of the opportunities that there have been to take evidence and visit the crofting counties. Those visits were an eye-opener to a softie from the warm south-west of the country. I thank the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee clerks and advisers, and the crofters for their hospitality and for contributing to my crofting education. As Maureen Watt said, our trips took place in February and March. That enabled us to see at first hand crofting work in some of the most difficult agricultural areas of Scotland by people who, in general, have full-time or part-time employment elsewhere. I was extremely impressed by the real commitment that the crofters showed to maintaining a traditional form of agriculture, despite the pressures of 21st century life and the harshness and length of winters in the north of Scotland.

Labour members share the aspiration to create a stable and sustainable future for crofting. However, as other members have said, it is not just regulation that is important in ensuring the future of crofting; economic development and opportunities and financial support are also important.

It has been said that we have significant reservations about aspects of the proposed legislation. I will add to what Sarah Boyack and Peter Peacock said in outlining those reservations.

In addition to the financial implications for crofters of the map-based register that is to be held by the Registers of Scotland, which Peter Peacock described, we believe that, as it stands, the financial memorandum to the bill does not address the resource implications for the commission, with its new and more onerous duties. Under the bill, any application for entry in the crofting register must first be considered by the crofting commission. Moreover, the commission's approval is required for many of the trigger points. The commission will have to weed out defective applications and ensure that any application that goes to the keeper of the register contains the appropriate and relevant information. The financial memorandum suggests that no additional

resource will be required to cope with that, whereas the Crofters Commission has suggested that two new full-time posts may be required to process and check applications at the pre-registration stage.

The bill places a duty on crofters to be ordinarily resident within 16km of their croft and not to neglect it. Some of our financial concerns result from the bill as it stands. I appreciate what the minister said about extension of the distance to 32km perhaps addressing some of our concerns, but I want to rehearse briefly what our concerns about that were.

Under the current legislation, the Crofters Commission has discretion to take action. Indeed, as the minister said, it was allocated £100,000 last year for a separate initiative to write to some 600 crofters who were known to live more than 16km from their croft. However, the Crofters Commission told us in supplementary evidence that around 10 per cent of tenant crofters live outwith that distance. The exact figures for owner-occupiers are not known, but the commission has estimated that around 4,000 crofts are not occupied in the sense that the person who works the croft does not live within 10 miles of it. The commission stated in its evidence that, without additional resources, it could process around 100 applications to be absent from a croft per year. Given the criteria, it could take around 40 years to deal with 4,000 applications if there was no further funding. I know that the minister argues that the staff resource that was allocated last year to deal with the initiative that I mentioned could be used in future years to deal with absenteeism applications. That might reduce the time in question, but it would still be 12 to 15 years before applications could be processed. Obviously, a change to 32km could change matters, as fewer crofters would be involved in the process, but we have not considered the financing of the crofting commission for its duties in relation to neglect—we have not considered what the costs and burden on it may be as a result of those.

The issue of how far crofters live from crofts is difficult. It can be argued that a distance of 10 miles is inappropriate at a time when most people have a car and can travel 10 miles in a fairly short period of time. On the other hand, those of us who represent rural constituencies know how diverse and different communities that are 10 miles apart can be, never mind communities that are 20 miles apart. A decision on the correct distance is a difficult one to ponder. As we go into stage 2, we will need to reflect further on the best point at which to trigger the absenteeism qualification.

John Scott: On the point at which communities stop and start, so to speak, does the member

agree that it is reasonable for the trigger to be different for different communities?

Elaine Murray: In theory, there is an attraction to that argument, but questions arise. How practical would it be? Would it add further to the bureaucracy of operating the trigger? The issue is difficult.

Labour members are supportive of the proposals for a partially elected crofting commission. My colleague Karen Gillon, who cannot attend the debate because of her duties today as a Scottish Parliament member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, has consistently raised the issue of equal opportunities to the point at which she became notorious among committee members for doing so, with people looking out for what she would say on the issue. Her concerns arise from the fact that, irrespective of who works the croft, around two thirds of registered crofters are men. In some parts of the crofting counties, the imbalance is much greater. If only registered crofters can vote and stand for election, clear gender equality issues arise. We believe that they can be addressed by extending the franchise to the registered crofter's spouse, civil partner or cohabitant. They would appear on the register, just as they appear on the electoral register for parliamentary and council elections, and could then elect members of the crofting commission and nominate people to stand for election. We are disappointed that thus far the minister has rejected the proposal.

The committee as a whole would like to see a consultation on constituency boundaries before a decision is taken between the two alternatives. As other members have said, Labour members themselves were divided on whether first past the post or AV should be the preferred electoral method. Peter Peacock came down on the side of AV. The minister is indicating that she has done the same.

Do I have a little extra time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes.

Elaine Murray: Thank you. The cabinet secretary is no longer in the chamber to moan and groan. I have just two brief points to make.

Labour members are concerned about the removal of Crown immunity from the crofting commission under schedule 1 to the bill. Evidence to the committee was that the commission acts as a tribunal and that the loss of Crown immunity would create uncertainty over the status of its hearings. I note that the Government has not accepted the point. In its response to our report, the Government did not comment on the possibility of the commission being sued in the civil courts, which could have budgetary

implications or implications for the manner in which decisions are made.

The bill gives Scottish ministers the power to change by order the functions of the commission. During stage 1, the Minister for Environment assured the committee that she had no intention of using that power. However, Labour members have serious reservations about the power, albeit that it may have been made redundant by provisions, which we opposed, in the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. We believe that the power should be removed from the bill or at least made subject to the super-affirmative procedure.

Labour members will support the bill's continuation to stage 2. Our view thereafter will depend on our discussions at stage 2 and amendments to the bill.

10:43

John Farquhar Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD): I thank Peter Peacock for his kind welcome. I am glad to be back in the Parliament; I was missing you all—I really was.

Having listened to the debate, I am pleasantly surprised to find goodwill on all sides for a package of measures for crofting reform that will be to the advantage of all who are actively engaged in crofting.

I take John Scott's point on the trigger point in different areas for absenteeism. His suggestion is a legitimate one. For many who live in the islands, the trigger point should go way beyond the 16km that is proposed in the bill.

I do not know why it was suggested that the legislation should be altered. It all started some years ago, away down in Argyll. A gentlemen in Tynault, who had a neglected croft and was absent for many years, was given planning permission for a group of 10 houses on the croft. Although there was quite a number of young applicants in the community who would have loved to have had tenancy of the croft, that was denied them. I remember speaking to the chairman of the Crofters Commission at the time and suggesting to him that the commission had been very lax in allowing the situation to happen: we considered the commission to be the regulator of all things crofting and all croft tenancies, yet it allowed the situation to go ahead. The chairman told me that the commission's hands were tied. I found that difficult to believe, but it seems it was a fact.

Jamie McGrigor: On the case to which the member refers, I remember that the Crofters Commission turned up without a lawyer, but the developer was represented by Queen's counsel.

John Farquhar Munro: To arrive there without any legal representation shows how interested the

Crofters Commission must have been—that speaks for itself.

My family have been active crofters for many generations. Although I have recently retired from crofting—at least, from active crofting—my son and his family continue with the traditions and culture of crofting. In fact, my son and his family live in a house in the village in which I was born.

As I said, I do not know what triggered this debate or the suggestion that we should have new legislation. Several years ago, the Scottish Parliament introduced a bill in an attempt to reform crofting. I am sorry to say that, for various reasons, it failed to secure any meaningful support. That was followed by Professor Shucksmith's inquiry into crofting, which was not very favourably received in any of the crofting townships. So, there were two attempts: the first was by the Scottish Parliament, and the second involved the Shucksmith report, which was even less acceptable.

Now the Scottish Government has introduced yet another bill to reform and regulate crofting, which has proven to be just as controversial as its predecessor. However, listening to the debate today, I think that we have come a long way and that there has been quite a change in attitude to what has been proposed. The trouble is that the bill is based heavily on the discredited Shucksmith proposals and was drafted by clerks here in Edinburgh. I think that the attempt to guide the bill through the Parliament is being made by people who might have a little understanding of agriculture, but who have no understanding whatsoever of crofting and its traditions.

I do not think that we need a bill to reform crofting. We do not need new legislation that will only complicate the lives of hard-working crofters. Most of all, we do not need a map-based register of crofts, as is suggested in the bill. All crofts are already registered with the Crofters Commission, so why do we need another, map-based register? I would not be happy trying to arrange a map-based register in my own township. I know that the crofters there have co-operated and worked their crofts over many years without any difficulty, but I think—in fact, I know—that the proposal to set them against one another in an attempt to arrange or agree a map-based register would be almost impossible to implement.

Mention has been made of planning approvals for development on croft land. If the bill is to be implemented, it must ensure that the crofting commission is a consultee in all planning matters that affect croft land. I do not think that that is unreasonable. The commission will perhaps require additional resources for that, but it has been suggested that additional resources will be directed to the operation of the crofting

commission; therefore, that can easily be arranged.

I could in no way support the original bill that was introduced in the Scottish Parliament. I found nothing in it that was acceptable to crofters and nothing to ensure the future of crofting—in fact, the very opposite. I had no wish to participate in a debate that would lead to the demise of crofting in any area, which is why I spoke strongly against that bill at several meetings.

The current regulations that are available to the Crofters Commission have served the crofting communities well for more than 100 years and I see no reason why they should not continue, without the interference of new rules and regulations. From day one, the attempt to get the current bill approved has already cost well in excess of £1 million—it has been a total waste of time and money. I have said all along that there is one simple solution. It has been mentioned today, and I am glad to see that it is finding favour with members.

Alasdair Allan: Will the member give way?

John Farquhar Munro: Sorry, but I am finishing.

All that we need is a democratically elected Crofters Commission—one that is elected from the crofting townships with a clear mandate to administer and enforce the existing regulations. I am sure that, if we had that, we would have a vibrant and viable crofting community.

10:52

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Like other members of the committee, I put on record my thanks for the hospitality that we received while gathering evidence. Escaping the biting winter winds in a warm croft house with a hot cup of tea was very pleasant. Like a few committee members, I am also curious to know whether there is now a cow in the Western Isles called Scottish Parliament.

It is logical to ask why we have crofting at all. As far as I am aware, it is a unique form of landholding that was instituted in 1886 to ensure that the individuals who lived on the land were treated fairly, or at least less harshly, than they had been in the preceding century. However, we have continued with crofting—why? It might be argued that it is to ensure that farming continues in upland areas, but I find that an unconvincing argument. Were farming the sole or main issue, would we not have encouraged landholdings large enough to support a family? That is something that the average croft—if not all crofts—is simply incapable of doing. We might even cease to farm some areas that are currently crofted, perhaps

concluding that the financial input would be better directed to richer agricultural land. It might be more convincing to argue that crofting can bring environmental benefits. There is no question but that grazing can enhance biodiversity and proper management of the land can further enhance the nature conservation value.

The recent Royal Society of Edinburgh report into the future of Scotland's islands and hills recommended that the Government have an explicit policy to maintain community viability, and I believe that that is the issue that lies at the heart of why we continue trying to improve crofting legislation. It reflects a determination on the part of the people of Scotland to ensure that our remote rural areas continue to hold and nurture viable communities. That is not to say that crofting can maintain communities of its own volition. It cannot. It is no coincidence that, where work is available, there are low levels of absenteeism from crofts. For that reason, the minister is correct about moving the economic development function from the commission to Highlands and Islands Enterprise so that we have one body concentrating on an essential aspect of ensuring viable communities in the Highlands and Islands.

Farming efficiency and food production cannot explain why we continue with crofting. There would be simpler ways of obtaining the environmental benefits. The real explanation is that we believe that our remote uplands and islands should continue to be populated. Therefore, the way in which we deal with neglect and absenteeism is critical. We took a great deal of evidence on neglect. It was, beyond doubt, an issue on which all crofters agreed. I make the point that there was strong agreement on that because strong and consistent agreement within the crofting community did not occur with excessive frequency—certainly not as often as agreement between, say, Liberals and Tories.

Neglect results in collapsed fences, loss of quality land and loss of opportunity for other crofters. I welcome the Government's decision to place on the commission a duty to tackle neglect, but we must first identify neglect. In the past, crofters have been unwilling to report instances of neglect. I can understand that. The risk of long-running feuds is a genuine worry. However, if neglect is to be tackled, the crofting communities must accept some responsibility. Perhaps the Government can make it easier for crofters by encouraging self-reporting by the community on the condition of all its crofts and self-reporting by individuals of their activities. However it is done, it is essential that we ensure that there is some means of identifying neglected crofts.

Having done that, we also need to encourage crofters who are not working their crofts to make

them available. On some crofts, that is done through informal arrangements, but they are not entirely desirable. Crofters who work land informally have no security of tenure and cannot apply for grants to maintain fencing and do other work. It is suggested that short-term leases might be encouraged and it is clear that there might be advantages in that, especially if those on short-term leases could apply for support to maintain the quality of the croft. However, it is important to avoid crofters finding themselves in the position of moving from one short-term lease to another. Security of tenure is central to crofting and multiple short-term leases would damage that principle—a principle with which I know the minister agrees.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the member accept that the reason for the neglect of crofts is often the financial viability of crofting rather than the fact that people are not present?

Bill Wilson: There are a range of reasons why people neglect crofts. The important thing is that if somebody else wishes to take over a croft, they have the opportunity to do so. That means that we have to identify crofts. If no one chooses to take the opportunity, so be it. However, if we ensure that there are not informal arrangements but arrangements that guarantee access to the financial resources and grants that are available to maintain crofts, they become more viable and it is economically more practical to run them.

There was less agreement among crofters on absenteeism. Some felt strongly that the issue is critical, but others said that it is not important if individuals are absent for 20 years or so and that eventually they will return. Personally, I cannot see how one can argue that crofting aims to maintain communities and then argue that absenteeism is not an issue. However, I whole-heartedly agree with the committee that the approach to absenteeism must be a pragmatic one. The issue is whether the individual contributes to the community or there is a reasonable expectation that they will do so.

The committee's report argues that the language in the bill should be changed to refer to people who are not ordinarily resident rather than to people who are absent. That would be a positive step. A trigger point to instigate an inquiry into the reason for non-residence is essential. However, altering the language would help to reassure crofters who work their crofts that they are not being unjustly labelled. Equally, the committee's recommendation that the commission should publish the criteria under which the commission will pursue cases of non-residency will also act as a reassurance. There has been some discussion about the trigger point. My view is straightforward—it should be pragmatic. If we can take a large number of possible non-residents

out of investigation by expanding the trigger point, we should do so, but I believe fundamentally that we need some form of trigger point.

There has been considerable debate about the value of a map-based register. It has been suggested that attempting to compile such a register will result in smouldering disagreements bursting into flame. Having listened to the various points of evidence, I am convinced of the need for such a mapping exercise. Had a register been completed in previous years, it is unlikely that Hamnavoe would have been built on the rough grazing and considerable conflict might well have been avoided.

Not infrequently, the settling of boundary disputes relies on folk memory. As one witness put it, we look for the person with the greyest beard. I would have thought that it was the whitest beard, but that is a small aside. However, the committee also took evidence that folk memory is receding as death, immigration and emigration slowly dilute it. If the mapping exercise is not carried out now, the opportunity to make use of that folk memory might well be lost. I believe that the decision to attempt the exercise is a bold one, but that it is the correct one, and I commend the minister for ignoring the timid and instead preferring to grasp the nettle.

Along with the rest of the committee, I agree that community mapping is likely to be the most effective exercise. I urge the minister to allow a period of grace prior to the introduction of the proposed triggers to encourage as wide community participation as possible. I appreciate that the minister has said that she will consider delaying the triggers for a year, but I am not certain that a year will be quite long enough.

Given the considerable experience of the Registers of Scotland, it is logical that the keeper of the registers of Scotland should have responsibility for developing and maintaining the map-based register. Given that we live in a world of broadband, I see no obvious reason why the commission should be in any way disadvantaged by the fact that the register is maintained by the keeper, as that will allow us to use the keeper's skills in building such a register. So long as the maps are readily accessible, I see no reason not to have the keeper maintain the register.

Crofting is a controversial subject—not least among crofters—so the likelihood of keeping everyone happy is, perhaps, not excessive. However, I believe that the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill is a bold attempt by the Scottish Government to improve crofting law. The attempt deserves to succeed.

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

11:00

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Let me begin by thanking the crofters and other individuals who, over the past weeks, months and indeed years, have taken the time and trouble to speak to me about the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill.

As John Farquhar Munro mentioned, when the previous crofting bill was before the Parliament, both he and I—and, indeed, others—gave stark warnings about what we saw as the limitations in those legislative proposals. That led to our receiving a favourable mention in Brian Wilson's organ—something that had never happened before and might never happen again. Like John Farquhar Munro and other representatives for the Highlands and Islands, I have taken an extremely close interest in the bill as it will have a direct impact and effect on my constituents, who live in some of the most remote areas with the most fragile economies.

In winding up on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, let me take the opportunity to comment on some of the speeches that we have heard. First, I believe that the minister used the correct expression when she said that crofting is a model for sustainable rural development. She also introduced the point that registration must be a requirement if it is to work and she mentioned the issue of absenteeism.

Sarah Boyack said, as I have also said, that crofting is a way of life in the Highlands and Islands. Quite correctly, she listed crofting's many benefits, to which I would add its contribution to tourism. Where a crofting township—Rogart in Sutherland is a good example—has crofts that are worked and that contribute to the local economy, they provide an attractive feature for tourists. We should never forget that point, as it is hugely important, particularly in the most remote areas. In highlighting the financial support systems that underpin crofting, Sarah Boyack also touched on—this rang a huge bell with all of us from the Highlands—crofting's place within the totality of the economy, to which is connected the issue of fuel costs. As I and others have said many times in previous debates, the fact is that the cost of motor fuel has a big impact on crofting in the Highlands.

A final point that Sarah Boyack mentioned was the balanced nature of the issue. As far as I am concerned, the issue is quite finely cast, so I reserve the right—as John Farquhar Munro and others have said—to vote the bill down. For that reason, we in the Liberal Democrats, like Peter Peacock, will support the amendment. That will provide the bill with life support, but my colleague Liam McArthur has made it clear that some surgery on the bill will be necessary. If we feel that

we have ended up with something that is inappropriate or a beast that will not work, we reserve the right to vote down the bill at stage 3. It is a fine balance.

Maureen Watt, quite correctly, gave an overview of the committee's consideration of the bill. She made a plea for the bill to proceed to stage 2, but nothing in Sarah Boyack's amendment would prevent the bill from going to the next stage, during which it will be scrutinised very closely indeed. She also mentioned the provisions for a map-based register.

John Scott told us that he is supportive of the thrust of the bill. He argued for a first-past-the-post system instead of AV, with one vote per croft. He also highlighted the issue of the choice of the commission's chairman. He made the point that the sustainability of the community in which the croft is located is crucial. That is linked to Sarah Boyack's point, which I have emphasised also takes in the issue of fuel duty.

My colleague Liam McArthur talked about the differences in crofting areas, and he is absolutely correct. I think of the crofting in Strath Halladale in Sutherland, where a lot of people have double incomes from crofting and being employed at Dounreay. As Dounreay runs down, that will impinge on crofting in a way that is quite different from the situation in Wester Ross in John Farquhar Munro's constituency or even in Orkney. That is an important point, which should be remembered.

I associate myself with Liam McArthur's suggestion that the commissioners should be able to elect their own chair. That would be profoundly sensible.

Alasdair Allan correctly reminded us about how far we have come since the draft bill. The beast that we see before us today is markedly different from the draft bill, and that is to be welcomed.

Peter Peacock correctly reminded us of the delicacy with which we should see and evaluate absenteeism and how we should address it. We have more work to do on that.

It might be a little too late to say this, but many of us were apprehensive about taking away the development function from the commission and giving it to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, because of the cutbacks to HIE's budget and staffing reductions. We felt that we could not exactly be confident that the money stream would be directed or controlled as well as it might be. However, I accept that we are where we are, and it is unfortunate.

I go back to the many representations that I have received from individuals and crofters about the register. Peter Peacock, too, expressed the

real reservations that exist. I am prepared for members to argue against me, but it is my considered opinion that a lot more must be done to convince crofters that it is a viable idea. The extra financial burdens that are being imposed on them are extremely unwelcome, and it probably cannot be done in the most fragile economies where so many crofters are. There is awareness of the register and mapping and I acknowledge the robust defence of the need for it by Rob Gibson and other colleagues, but we have a long way to go to take crofters and people who are involved in crofting with us.

Elaine Murray was interesting, especially in talking about the wider financing of the commission. A point was made about the definition of the distance from the croft. Someone—I forget which member; perhaps it was Jamie McGrigor—said that it depends on where one is. Things will be different in Strath Halladale, Wester Ross or Skye, and it depends on the nature of the local economy and the location of supporting employment.

I will conclude with two points, if I have time. First, and on a personal level, I am grateful to Peter Peacock for his kind remarks about seeing John Farquhar Munro back with us. He is a colleague and a personal friend, and he is the most real crofter in the Parliament. His opinions are hugely important so, when he counsels caution, we should listen.

Jamie McGrigor: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Stone: Certainly, if I have time.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the member agree that if we are to make crofting more viable, productive and profitable, it would be wise of the Government to consider ways of making land management options, for example, relevant to crofts and of encouraging crofters to go into small food production businesses, such as the making of cheese? *[Laughter.]*

Jamie Stone: Well, I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I approach the subject with caution because my brother might not welcome competition in certain forms of dairy produce. Nevertheless, I accept the wit with which Mr McGrigor made his intervention.

The jury is still out on the bill. That is the thrust of the speeches from Sarah Boyack and other members—*[Interruption.]* We will have to do a lot of convincing if we are to take the crofting counties with us. As I said, not so much as a Liberal Democrat but as a member who represents a crofting constituency, I reserve the right to vote the bill down. We will leave it on life support for the moment, but I assure members that, if it ain't going to fly, it ain't going to fly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, I remind members that you have to have your BlackBerrys off. The noise is bad enough in here but, believe me, if you are a sound engineer it is much worse. Now make sure that your BlackBerrys are off.

11:10

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am not a member of the committee that scrutinised the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, so sadly I did not have the opportunity afforded to committee members to visit some of the crofting communities to see and hear at first hand the issues that the bill needs to address. Being firmly rooted in the north-east of Scotland, I am afraid that I have no direct personal experience of crofting. However, I am aware of the fragility of the crofting lifestyle, which has been made worse by the recent decline in sheep farming, and of the need for crofters to have an alternative income, which may sometimes mean going quite far away from their crofts, for example to work in the North Sea oil industry.

The laws that regulate crofting have become increasingly complex over the years and there seems little agreement among crofters on how they should be improved. The bill is a genuine attempt to underpin and sustain a way of life that is extremely important for some of Scotland's most remote and fragile areas.

I have spent some considerable time reading the *Official Reports* of the committee's evidence-taking sessions and its conclusions in its stage 1 report, and I have listened with great interest this morning as members across the chamber have articulated their opinions on various aspects of the bill's proposals.

Sarah Boyack and Elaine Murray expressed significant concerns about several aspects of the bill, as detailed in the Labour amendment, and they stressed the point that financial resources and incentives must be identified to underpin the legislation. Peter Peacock remains fundamentally opposed to a map-based register of crofts, which he regards as unnecessary, and to charging for registration. However, he is in favour of community mapping, which appears to have widespread support throughout the chamber.

For the committee, Maureen Watt reminded members that we should be realistic about what legislation can achieve on its own and that regulation alone will not secure the future of crofting.

My colleague John Scott expressed a fear, which he hopes will not be realised, that there will be apathy and low turnout for elections to the crofting commission—and, as members know, we

have not had it all our own way recently on the methods for voting in elections. He also emphasised the need for crofters to be resident in order to sustain the crofting community.

Liam McArthur voiced concerns about the intention to have ministers appoint the chairman of the commission instead of leaving that to members of the commission. John Farquhar Munro, with his lifelong personal experience of crofting, sees no need for further crofting legislation as he feels that existing regulation has served the crofting communities well.

The policy memorandum to the bill makes it clear that

"The objectives of this Bill are to put in place a robust regulatory and governance framework for the future of crofting ... and ensure that crofting continues to contribute to sustainable economic growth in some of Scotland's most remote, rural communities."

That sounds good, but it is clear from the evidence sessions that crofters are not happy with the bill as it stands and that, assuming the general principles are accepted at decision time today, further work will be required to strengthen and improve it as it progresses through the parliamentary process.

There has undoubtedly been growing and widespread concern in recent years that crofting is in decline as a result of persistently high levels of absenteeism, increasing neglect of crofting land and the on-going removal and development of land from crofting tenure. There has been a general feeling that the existing governance arrangements and regulatory framework have not been successful in stopping that decline. As I said at the outset, there is a general acceptance that crofting law has become overly complex and needs to be consolidated and simplified, but I know that it is agreed that that would be for consideration by a future Administration and not part of the bill under discussion.

The intentions of the various parts of the bill are clear and admirable: to make the Crofters Commission more effective in delivering its core function of regulating crofting; to allow it to amend its constitution to allow for directly elected members, thus making it more representative of, and accountable to, the people it regulates; and to give it more flexibility to develop its regulatory policy in the interests of crofting communities and the wider public interest. All those proposals seem very sensible and acceptable.

The proposals in part 2 for a new, map-based register, which would clearly define the extent of, and interests in, a croft and other land within crofting tenure, such as common grazings, should, it is claimed, give security to crofters over their tenancy. The proposals in part 3 to place a duty on the commission to take action in respect of

absenteeism and neglect by tenant and owner-occupier crofters should, on the face of it, help to ensure that crofting will contribute to the sustainable economic growth of crofting communities by requiring crofters to be resident on or near their land and to put it to some kind of productive use.

Part 4 is aimed at helping to sustain crofting communities and the environmental, cultural and landscape benefits that derive from a crofting lifestyle, by tackling speculation on the development value of croft land through strengthening the commission's ability to reject an application to take the land out of crofting tenure.

All of that sounds fine, but the devil is in the detail, and many of the proposals in the bill have proven to be controversial in the crofting communities, and the committee has not been able to agree on some of them either, as we have seen from the report and heard in today's debate. There has clearly been a great deal of discussion and debate around the bill, and many issues are as yet unresolved. Overall, however, it appears that the proposed legislation should have a positive impact on the crofting communities, and will go some way towards halting the decline that has beset them in recent years.

I conclude by stating that, as John Scott has said, we will support the general principles of the bill at stage 1, but on the basis that there will have to be significant changes and amendments at stage 2.

11:16

Sarah Boyack: Perhaps debates on crofting should be a special sub-category of debate in the Parliament. This has been an interesting debate, and it is clear that there are areas on which we can all agree, across the chamber. Although I welcome some of Roseanna Cunningham's responses to the committee's recommendations, I hope that she will take some time to stand back and reflect on the tone and substance of what some of us have said today. There is an opportunity to do more to improve the bill. The minister has not had a lot of time to respond to the committee's recommendations, and it would be good if she could do so before getting to the real detail that colleagues such as Elaine Murray talked about. If the minister wants to talk further to any of us before stage 2, she will be able to do that.

Maureen Watt gave a fascinating account of the committee's travels. Having visited Camuscross and walked through the land there and talked to crofters about the issues that they face, I know that some of the issues are incredibly complex. The fact that this is our second crofting bill in five

years means that the crofting communities are well geared up to lobby us and reflect on what we are debating. We also have an opportunity to reflect on their concerns.

I was struck by the extent to which John Scott agreed with us on issues such as the underfunding of the commission and the need to allow the right amount of time if we are to go down the road of community mapping, which he and others across the chamber have supported. We have differing emphases. He is much more enthusiastic about aggressively promoting more owner occupation in crofting, while we think that there is still a role for people to rent their crofts. We think that that is part of the mix. Crofting is different across Scotland—

John Scott: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: Let me finish this point, which relates to the point that Liam McArthur made very powerfully. The ambition for crofting is the same across Scotland, but crofting is different in different parts of Scotland, and we must ensure that that variety is reflected. It is a cultural issue in some parts of Scotland, and we must ensure that there is a role for people who are owner-occupiers and for people who rent their crofts. We must also consider the new opportunities that we discussed in relation to the Crofting Reform etc Act 2007, about bigger organisations giving land so that people can rent and, possibly, buy crofts.

Liam McArthur focused on that variety of crofting traditions. We need to focus on that. He also made the powerful point that we must not make things worse—a point that was made in debates around the 2007 act, influenced heavily by John Farquhar Munro; that is a powerful principle in developing legislation. Liam McArthur's comments were backed up by several members. Let us not only get the elections to the crofting commission right, but make the commission more proactive.

Alasdair Allan made some powerful points about the need to democratise the commission and to use the Government's power to promote the elections. He said that we should do what we can to engage people in the process of tackling neglect, and that anything that can be done to minimise costs would be welcome.

A question that has emerged loud and clear during the bill process is whether we need a second register. We are all trying to wrestle with the need for a more community-based approach to crofting and to bring people together to make the most of the expertise that has been built up over the years. I suggested earlier that perhaps there should be a special sub-category of debates in Parliament for crofting. Peter Peacock's comments

took us to the heart of the debate when he said that

“absenteeism of itself is not necessarily a problem—it is only a problem when it is a problem.”

That more or less sums up the debate.

John Scott: Could the same be said of the Labour Party?

Sarah Boyack: It is not just about our views. If we went out and talked to crofters, we would get the same equivocation. We need to sort something, but at the same time we need to be careful how we sort it or we may make it worse.

John Scott: Does not that sum up the dilemma that faces the Labour Party, which is that it is only a problem when it is a problem? The issue could have been addressed in the previous bill. The issue must be faced up to—it is only reasonable that that should happen.

Sarah Boyack: I could not disagree more. We introduced some valuable provisions in the previous bill, which the Parliament passed. We removed the bits of the bill on which we could not get the right answer at the time. It would have been wrong to include in legislation provisions that did not have the confidence of the Parliament and, crucially, of the crofting communities. That is why we need to listen carefully to the commonsense comments of the crofting communities. Peter Peacock focused on the need for the crofting commission to have a strategic plan, with the opportunity to bring big benefits.

Jamie Stone talked about adding the possibility of tourism benefits. We must consider crofting positively. The bill must be about not just protecting what we have, but seeing how the crofting communities can develop in the future. That is why there is such nervousness about a map-based register. Roseanna Cunningham said that such a register could cost millions, while Peter Peacock said that it could take 40 years to complete. There are some mixed-up views on the map-based register that we must bottom out before we reach the end of stage 2. We cannot support something that we think will be manifestly complex and massively expensive and which will not bring benefits. We are much more in favour of the community mapping approach. There is huge consensus among members that we need to go down that route. John Scott mentioned that the SRPBA would be keen to go down that route. Landowners and crofters want us to take the issue seriously.

Let us go back to the evidence that was presented to the committee on the map-based register. On the one hand, the minister told us that it is straightforward to adapt the existing information technology system and that expertise

and design processes are already in place. Contrast that with the evidence from the Registers of Scotland, whose short answer was that an IT system could be built anywhere to create the register. I am extremely concerned about massive expenditure on IT. The legacy of the past 20 years is of Governments having real difficulty designing new IT systems. Why make such a straightforward agenda much more complex? Everyone wants to give the crofting communities the chance to survive and to support individual crofters. Let us not make it worse for them. Let us not create something that will be massively bureaucratic and expensive, without proven benefits. That is the mood among many members. I hope that the minister will reflect that—if not when she sums up, at least before stage 2.

As Elaine Murray pointed out, detailed scrutiny of the bill is needed. That has not been done even at stage 1. Our job at stage 2 will be to examine the bill in detail to ensure that we do not make any mistakes. Elaine Murray gave us the same detailed critique of the trigger process that crofters organisations and individual crofters have given, and we need to listen to those comments. For a start, the election system has to be fair.

We have a major opportunity that we need to get right; if we do not, we will simply throw away the hours of consultation, the hours of listening to people and the hours of good debate that has been had not only in the committee but out and about in the crofting communities and in the chamber today. Our crofting debates have a particular flavour but, as we learned during the passage of the Crofting Reform etc (Scotland) Act 2007, we should take this opportunity to reflect and to think really hard about things to ensure that we do not put the wrong legislation on the statute book. There are good things in the bill and Roseanna Cunningham, since becoming minister, has already made a number of changes. We need to continue the process and end up with a bill that we can all sign up to, not something that we are divided on.

11:25

Roseanna Cunningham: The debate has been interesting and I am grateful to members for their contributions. Before I respond to a number of points that have been raised, I want to say that I am pleased that, at least at this stage, we broadly agree on the bill's principles. There has been agreement not only on the need for action to tackle absenteeism, neglect and speculation and the mechanisms in that respect, but on the need for a more democratic and accountable crofting commission.

As for the issue on which there is perhaps most disagreement—the crofting register—it is vital for

the future of crofting that everybody is clear about the land that is held in crofting tenure, what the boundaries are and who has an interest in that land. That is important not just for the regulation of crofting—which, after all, has done without a map-based register for the past 55 years—but to everyone with an interest in crofting and, in particular, to the crofter. Why on earth should a crofter be faced with the prospect of anyone with an interest having the ability to go to the Scottish Land Court at any time to question whether their holding is a croft, whether they are the tenant of the croft and what the boundaries of the croft are? A proper crofting register such as the one that we are proposing would minimise that risk.

It has been argued that such a move is unnecessary and that everybody knows where the boundaries are. I suppose that we should be grateful that no one has taken the same view about the boundaries of our own homes. In Scotland, we have a huge property register that has undergone enormous change over the past number of decades and is still not yet complete. As we will all recognise, these things take time. However, the assumption that everyone knows where the boundaries are is not borne out in practice. It is clearly not the case—if it were, the Land Court would not be doing the work that it is doing—and, indeed, it is less likely to be the case when the men with “the longest and greyest” beards, as Simon Fraser called them, pass away.

My fear is that unless we start putting in place a mechanism for recording croft land, knowledge of crofting boundaries will be lost and more and more crofters will find themselves in the Land Court. In a previous existence, I had to deal with title deeds that described the boundaries of land in terms of the oak tree in the north-west corner and the big pile of stones at the other end. I fundamentally believe that we cannot continue in that way.

A number of the points that members made in the debate were about wanting more money. I will set aside that issue for the moment, because I think that there are two sides to it. Sarah Boyack suggested that the crofting commission should have a direct say in planning; that it, and not the keeper of the registers of Scotland, should maintain the register; and that there should be a change to the franchise. She also seemed to infer that she was opposed to equalising the law between the tenants and owner-occupiers and wanted the current register to be updated with maps as a way of resolving certain issues.

That said, in her closing speech, Ms Boyack pertinently pointed out that Parliament passed a verdict on certain parts of the 2006 bill, which became the 2007 act, and quite rightly removed areas on which there was no significant agreement. I gently point out to her that one

proposal that was removed was precisely that the current register should be updated and used and have maps added. So, by her logic, we should not proceed to have another argument about that, because it was removed from the previous proposals for legislation. There are things that we can talk about in Sarah Boyack’s proposals, although I have indicated concerns about some of them, such as the proposal to give the commission a direct say in planning. There is a debate still to be had.

I watched with interest John Scott’s manoeuvring on the vexed issue of the alternative vote. One of his most interesting suggestions was the self-survey idea. We will want to explore that to find out what opportunities exist to help us do what we are doing.

Liam McArthur clearly believes that the Shucksmith report should have been the mechanism for kicking into touch proposals for crofting legislation. That was certainly the tenor of his comments. I gently suggest to him that he should take care with that principle in case it comes back to bite his party’s interest in another place. Government should not be about trying to find easy ways of kicking things into touch, although I fear that Liam McArthur might be involved in rather more of that in the next few years than he would otherwise have wished to be. He, too, has concerns about the register and he still seems to believe that there is a bottomless pit of money. However, I hold out hope, because he now has a direct line to the new chancellor in Westminster, so he might be able to resolve some of our financial concerns and ensure that we have as much money as we need to do the things that we need to do.

Peter Peacock disagrees with a map-based register. He approached the issue in his usual mischievous fashion. He said that he objects to charging for regulatory activities that are required by law, so I presume that he will propose that we remove all fees from planning applications. In fact, charging for regulatory activities already happens. If we were to take the principled stand that I am sure Peter Peacock wants us to assume that he is taking, we would have to remove all fees for planning applications and other regulatory activities.

Other members made good points. Rob Gibson made a particularly interesting point about a wider basis for considering the register, which was more about land use and, dare I say it, land reform. That was a much wider and more philosophical argument. Some members have an interest in land rental as a potential for tax. On many issues that arise if we take that broader and more philosophical basis, the register is extraordinarily important. It seems to me strange to want to

continue to deal with crofting in some kind of old-fashioned, out-of-date and 19th century way—for reasons that are not very clear—when we are now in the 21st century. We have to think about what that demands and what opportunities it gives us through technology and our understanding.

As always, John Farquhar Munro made some interesting comments. I, too, welcome him back to the chamber. He said that we do not really need a bill at all. Of course, the problem with that approach is that it is a recipe for the Taynuilt situation arising again and again if we do not do something to fix the issue. The Whitbread loophole would not be closed, as we need legislation to close it. The difficulty with simply not having a bill is that the issues that have begun to open up and the practices that are not advantageous to crofting would never be dealt with.

There is a real fear among many people that if crofting is not addressed in the 21st century, it is likely to die out. That will not happen overnight—nothing does—but the fear of many people, and of the Government, is that if we do not address it, it is likely gradually to disappear. For all the reasons that Sarah Boyack gave in her closing speech, which have to do with culture, history and tradition, I do not believe that we want crofting to disappear. It is therefore important that we address it.

I thank the committee for all the work that it put in at stage 1 to inform this debate. I thank all the stakeholders who, through their evidence, helped us understand the issues that affect crofting. Although I wished occasionally that they could reach some kind of unanimous view, I have learnt that that will probably never happen. Our engagement with the stakeholders and the committee will continue from here. Sarah Boyack can be certain that I will take up the suggestion that we continue to have discussions about how we proceed.

I urge members to reject Labour's amendment, because it distorts the clear message that I believe we should be sending out about tackling all the issues that threaten the future of crofting. In my view, it is not even particularly accurate, even if it is only to reflect Labour's position. The Scottish Crofting Federation's response to the consultation on the draft bill stated:

"The proposal to charge crofters for regulation is [only] acceptable in cases where the crofter will financially benefit from the transaction—decrofting the house site for example."

I rather think that that somewhat undermines Labour's assertion that

"new charges ... are not supported by crofters".

They might not be supported by some crofters, but, as we have seen, there is no unanimity in the crofting community.

I have listened to the points that have been made today and I will reflect on them in the days to come. I have indicated where the Government will lodge amendments at stage 2 and I am sure that we will continue to discuss ways in which our common vision for crofting can be realised.

I point out, however, that I do not have a magic wand for fixing everything overnight—that does not happen. I certainly do not have a magic wand that prints money—none of us does. However, I have no doubt that everyone in this chamber wants a bright future for crofting—a future with thriving crofting townships and strong communities built by a permanent population whose members support one another; where croft land is nurtured and used to grow fine food or to enhance the environment; and where people continue to learn the proud crofting heritage and culture that enriches our nation. I remain confident that the bill will set us off in that direction and that there remains the will in the chamber to see it through.

Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

11:38

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-5673, in the name of John Swinney, on the financial resolution on the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill, agrees to any increase in expenditure of a kind referred to in paragraph 3(b)(iii) of Rule 9.12 of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act.—[*Roseanna Cunningham.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time. I will now vacate the chair for two or three seconds.

11:38

Meeting suspended.

11:40

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

Legislative Plans

1. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what impact the United Kingdom Government's legislative programme is expected to have on the Scottish Government's legislative plans. (S3O-10526)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Bruce Crawford): We understand that the UK Government's legislative programme will not be announced until the Queen's speech on 25 May. The Scottish Government will continue to pursue a constructive relationship with the UK Government to serve best the interests of the people of Scotland.

Patrick Harvie: Now that Mr Clegg and Mr Cameron have sealed what I am sure they regard as a perfect union, it is clear that their plans will include measures to address the constitutional union. That might result in some positives, such as the additional powers that the Calman commission recommended, but it might also have negatives. What is the Scottish Government's view on the fact that no consultation, and certainly no public vote, are proposed on the additional powers; that a legal requirement could be implemented for Holyrood and Westminster elections to coincide on the same day in 2015; that a UK sovereignty bill could be introduced to establish Parliament's sovereignty, which would be out of keeping with the Scottish tradition; and that the partnership agreement makes oblique references to the West Lothian question?

Bruce Crawford: As Patrick Harvie might expect, the Scottish Government will seek to work constructively with the UK Government. We will seek a relationship that is based on mutual trust and parity of esteem. One of the first tests of that relationship relates to the Calman proposals, to which Patrick Harvie referred. We have always said that some of the proposals are positive, as he said. However, the finance and taxation recommendations have significant flaws. They would deliver less transparency and less accountability and would expose the Scottish Government's budget to significant risks without adequate levers to address those risks. The UK Government needs to be open about considering those issues.

I know that Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Parliament have grave doubts about the proposals. I hope that, with the help of Liberal Democrat MSPs, we can secure an agreement with the Secretary of State for Scotland on a much-improved package of financial measures, which will be good for the people of Scotland.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I warn the Minister for Parliamentary Business not to wish for too much. He might get a referendum that is held from London.

Under “6. Political Reform”, the coalition agreement says that

“a binding motion”

should be tabled

“before the House of Commons in the first days following this agreement”

to hold Westminster elections on the same day as the Scottish parliamentary elections. As a Parliament, can we urgently approach Westminster now to stop that?

Bruce Crawford: I have every sympathy with Margo MacDonald’s point. We in the Parliament worked hard to implement the Gould recommendation that the Parliament’s elections should be decoupled from and should not take place on the same day as local government elections. If elections for this place and Westminster were held on the same day, that would run contrary to the Gould recommendations. I can only hope that, in the rush to what is now a political oxymoron, the parties did not particularly examine their decision, and that we can persuade them over time to change their minds.

Child Poverty

2. Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the growing up in Scotland reports, what measures are being taken to tackle child poverty. (S3O-10499)

The Minister for Children and Early Years (Adam Ingram): The growing up in Scotland reports confirm that the relationship between income poverty and other forms of disadvantage is very complex. The reports found that, although persistent low income is strongly associated with poor outcomes for children, it is highly contingent on other factors. Taken in isolation, it is not strongly associated, and many other types of disadvantage are important determinants of children’s outcomes.

Accordingly, our approach to tackling child poverty in Scotland, which is set out in our three key social policy frameworks—“Achieving Our Potential”, “Equally Well” and “Early Years

Framework”—is broad based and holistic. It recognises that family income is a significant issue but that concentrating on income alone is not enough. Our three frameworks include measures to tackle child poverty from a range of angles, such as parenting support and income maximisation for families who are in poverty.

Aileen Campbell: Does the minister share my concern that child poverty—indeed, any form of domestic poverty—is not mentioned in the agreement that the United Kingdom coalition Government published yesterday? Will he and the Scottish Government reaffirm their commitment to ending the scandal of child poverty in Scotland? Does he agree that the best way of doing that is to give the Parliament the full powers of independence?

Adam Ingram: I absolutely agree that the best way for us to deal with child poverty in Scotland is by full independence being passed to the Parliament and the people of Scotland. We would have hoped that child poverty would be a top priority for the incoming Government. This is a missed opportunity for the Government to be more positive and to reaffirm the joint commitment to eradicating child poverty by 2020, to which all four countries in the UK have signed up. However, we remain committed to working with the new Government and the other devolved Administrations in a spirit of co-operation on our joint goal of achieving the 2020 child poverty targets.

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): Although all members will express concern about the fact that child poverty is not a priority for the new Conservative-Liberal Government at Westminster, does the minister agree that the Scottish Government has considerable powers to help to eradicate child poverty? Does he also agree that breakfast clubs such as those that are run in my constituency are an excellent way of ensuring that children have a healthy and inexpensive start to their day and are properly set up for a day’s learning? Exactly what commitment does the Scottish Government have to ensuring that every child in Scotland has the best start to their day?

Adam Ingram: Our policy frameworks are well known to all members. I acknowledge and agree that the initiatives in Ms Whitefield’s area are positive contributions to those frameworks.

Local Health Services

3. Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what importance it attaches to delivering health services at a local level. (S3O-10456)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): We are committed to providing health care services as locally as is appropriate and possible.

Cathie Craigie: Is the cabinet secretary aware that NHS Lanarkshire has not invested in local health centres in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth in the past three years and is cutting—and proposing further cuts to—local services? For example, a registered blind 80-year-old woman living on her own has been told that she will not receive podiatry services from NHS Lanarkshire. Does the cabinet secretary believe that that is delivering at local level?

Nicola Sturgeon: If Cathie Craigie would like to write to me about the constituency case that she mentioned, I would be more than happy to look into the specifics.

NHS Lanarkshire, in common with national health service boards across the country, is investing in a range of services and initiatives to improve the quality of health care. It is right and proper that NHS boards do that, given that the NHS budget this year is £264 million larger than it was last year. It is important that that money is invested for the benefit of patients throughout Scotland. NHS Lanarkshire is still investing in the accident and emergency department at Monklands hospital, which would not exist if certain members had had their way. I am glad to say that the department is still open and is treating patients.

There are tough times ahead for the NHS, as there are for the whole public sector. The Government will strive, as it has done this year, to protect the NHS as far as is possible. I hope that all members who genuinely care about the NHS—I include Cathie Craigie in that definition—will come together and work together to do everything that they can to protect the NHS, which is so highly cherished by the people of Scotland.

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): The cabinet secretary might be aware of proposed changes to out-of-hours services in parts of the NHS Lanarkshire area. She might also be aware of the proposed removal of X-ray services in Cumbernauld. Given that total expenditure in NHS Lanarkshire in 2005, under Labour, was £650 million, whereas total expenditure in 2009, under the current Government, was £850 million, does she agree that such changes cannot be justified on a financial basis?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am aware that NHS Lanarkshire is considering a number of proposals, to ensure best value for taxpayers' investment. I also understand that no decisions have been made to date on out-of-hours or X-ray services. Local people should be assured that proposals

from any health board that would significantly alter services must be subject to full public consultation and, in certain circumstances, to ministerial approval.

As I said to Cathie Craigie, and as Jamie Hepburn indicated, the health budget for NHS Lanarkshire and other health boards is higher this year than it has been in any other year—we have a record high health budget. It is important that the money is invested well, for the benefit of patients. It is also right and proper in the current financial climate that NHS boards consider where they can make efficiency savings in order to ensure that every pound of taxpayers' money is spent wisely.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

4. Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S3O-10467)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I meet all health board chairs regularly. The next meeting is scheduled for 24 May.

Paul Martin: In response to a previous question the cabinet secretary referred to increased funds being made available to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. She also referred to ministerial approval. Has she given ministerial approval for the redundancy notices that have been served on porters at Stobhill hospital, in my constituency?

Nicola Sturgeon: If Paul Martin writes to me about a constituency issue that concerns Stobhill hospital, I will be happy to look into it and respond to him in detail.

As I have said before, I value the contribution of every member of national health service staff as, I know, all members do. Together, NHS staff provide first-class services to the people of Scotland. As we go through the next few years, which will be challenging for everyone who works in the public sector, it will be important that we work together to do everything that we can to protect staff and the services that they provide.

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the many on-going difficulties in community health and care partnerships, in particular in Glasgow. Last month, the British Medical Association said that CHCPs are

“expensive talking shops which have achieved very little.”

What safeguards are in place to ensure that CHCPs are fit for purpose?

Nicola Sturgeon: In principle, CHCPs and community health partnerships are a good idea,

because they help to integrate health services with the services that local authorities provide. If CHCPs are to work effectively, it is important that health boards and local authorities go into them in a genuine spirit of partnership. I want that to be the case in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area.

It is important that the people who take forward CHCPs listen to the views of the people who work on the front line, such as general practitioners, social workers and other health care professionals, and take full cognisance of their knowledge and experience to ensure that CHCPs develop in a way that is beneficial for the delivery of services and for the people who use services.

Food Products (Labelling)

5. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with European Union environment ministers regarding the labelling of food products with genetically modified contents. (S3O-10507)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): Scottish ministers have attended meetings of the EU environment council, but that subject has not been discussed.

Rob Gibson: The European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee has voted overwhelmingly in a second reading debate that

"Products produced from animals fed with genetically modified feeding stuffs must be labelled with the words 'produced from animals fed with genetically modified feeding stuffs'."

Is the minister aware of that? Can the Scottish Government help Scottish shoppers to benefit from the widespread wish in Europe to allow consumers a clear view of the GM content in animal feed that is used to produce food for human consumption?

Roseanna Cunningham: The EU is currently involved in a number of debates about regulation of genetically modified organisms in the EU area. The Scottish Government is, of course, in favour of transparency in food labelling and believes that Scottish shoppers have the right to know what they are buying. Our stance on genetically modified organisms is well known. However, I understand that, although GM animal feed must be labelled as being GM, the European Food Safety Authority says that it is impossible to detect genetically modified material in food products such as meat, milk and eggs from animals that have been fed on GM feed. Therefore, there are technical difficulties. That said, I note that the European Parliament and the member have suggested something a little different. The more

general labelling idea is attractive, and I hope that it will be part of the Commission's review of the GM regulations.

NHS Lothian (Meetings)

6. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when ministers last met NHS Lothian and what issues were discussed. (S3O-10476)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I met the chair of NHS Lothian on 17 March, when we discussed a wide range of matters that affect the delivery of patient services. As I said in an answer to a previous question, I will next meet the health board chairs as a group on 24 May. I also met NHS Lothian informally at the opening of NHS Lothian's X-ray and ultrasound service yesterday.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There should be a little bit less noise from members, please.

Mary Mulligan: From the cabinet secretary's discussions with Lothian NHS Board, can she say whether the rezoning of patients from the west of Edinburgh to St John's hospital is still being progressed? If it is not, why not?

Nicola Sturgeon: In general, when I meet NHS Lothian representatives, I take the time to discuss with them the considerable improvements that have been made at St John's hospital over the past three years. I will elaborate on that for Mary Mulligan and other members. In-patient admissions to that hospital have increased by nearly 2 per cent, out-patient activity has increased by 43.5 per cent, and revenue expenditure at the hospital is up by 19 per cent. Those are all signs of the commitment that the Government has given to the future of St John's as an acute hospital in Lothian.

On Mary Mulligan's specific question, I understand that Lothian NHS Board has considered activity data for St John's hospital and has concluded that the increases in day cases, elective patients and emergency medical admissions exceed by a considerable margin the contribution that would be expected from rezoning patients from the west of Edinburgh. I am more than happy to correspond with Mary Mulligan on the details of that and, indeed, on other developments at St John's hospital.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): In view of the funding challenges that the national health service faces, does the cabinet secretary think that it is particularly important that each NHS board should get the funding share to which it is entitled under the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee formula?

Is she concerned that, this year, NHS Lothian is getting 13.69 per cent of the cake although it is entitled to 14.61 per cent of it? That is a funding gap of £69 million. It is even more concerning that the gap is £5 million greater than it was last year.

Nicola Sturgeon: Malcolm Chisholm asks an important question, which he is right to ask as a member for the Lothians. As a former health minister, he is aware that a number of boards in Scotland, including NHS Lothian, get below their parity share of funding. That has not been the case only under the NRAC system; it was also the case under the previous allocation formula which, of course, the previous Government introduced. We have made a commitment, as the previous Government did, to move those boards' funding up towards the share that they should receive as quickly as possible. That has to be done gradually because doing it in a one-off would involve taking money away from other boards. I do not think that that would be appropriate, which is why I have given a commitment that no board will lose any funding as we move towards the target shares under the NRAC. I hope that all members welcome that commitment.

Finally, Malcolm Chisholm will be aware that, for the past couple of years, NHS Lothian has received a greater increase in its budget than boards that are not below NRAC parity, for the purpose of bringing it closer to that. As long as we are able to continue to do that within the funding arrangements, we will continue to make progress.

Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): The previous Government gave a green light for the replacement of Dalkeith medical centre but, so far, no work has started on that. Will the minister give an assurance that work will start soon? Can she give us a completion date for the work?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am more than happy to provide in writing to the member the detail on the timeline for Dalkeith medical centre. As members from all parts of the country know, we are seeing investment in health centres and medical centres throughout the country due to the record investment in the health service, including record capital investment. That is an incredibly good thing to see.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day (S3F-2386)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today, I will have meetings to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Iain Gray: Two weeks ago, I asked the First Minister whether he would match Labour's election promise to protect our schools and hospitals. He said, "Yes." Was he telling the truth?

The First Minister: As Iain Gray knows, I always aspire to tell the truth at First Minister's question time, just as every member of the Parliament does.

During the election campaign, the Scottish National Party wished to have a position where we could more than match any of the London parties in terms of the future of the Scottish economy. We recognised that we could do that only by having economic powers in Scotland to enable us to grow the economy and get people back to work.

Iain Gray: The First Minister also aspired to win 20 seats last Thursday and he fell pretty far short—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Order.

Iain Gray: Just as a baker's dozen is 13 instead of 12, a Salmond score is six instead of 20.

I suspect that the First Minister probably could not bring himself to read the Scottish press on the day after the election. If he had done so, he would have read that 700 jobs are to go in NHS Lothian, mental health provision is being slashed and a new kidney unit is being cancelled in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, and 500 cleaning hours are being cut at Glasgow royal infirmary. When he told the chamber that he would protect the national health service, was he covering up those cuts, or does he just not know what is going on? Is the First Minister shameless or just clueless?

The First Minister: NHS spending across Scotland this year is £264 million higher. That is the budget increase for the NHS in Scotland, despite the reduction of £500 million in the Scottish Government budget.

Before Iain Gray moves into full oppositionist mode and tries to deny responsibility for the budget cuts that are currently being visited on Scotland by the previous Labour Government, and

before he tries to refight the general election, he should remember that the Labour Party's claim in the general election was that if people in Scotland voted Labour, they would be protected from a Conservative Government. People in Scotland did vote Labour, Labour won 41 seats and we now have a Conservative Government at Westminster. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: On Monday, the Prime Minister announced at 5 past 5 that he was opening talks with the Liberal Democrats to form a progressive alliance that he said would be much better for the country. At 8.49, John Reid came on television to say:

"I think the decision to try and enter a Lib-Lab pact, coalition, is potentially a disastrously wrong one for the country, for the party and for Gordon himself."

If we have the extraordinary position of Labour, having failed to win the election despite gathering the support of the Scottish people, ducking the opportunity to form an anti-Tory Government, how on earth can Iain Gray or any other Labour MSP come to the chamber and start complaining about the Tory cuts to come?

Iain Gray: We will get to the Tory cuts to come in a moment.

At 11 o'clock this very morning, unions emerged from a meeting with Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board at which they had been presented with the plan that I have in my hand—a plan to cut more than 1,200 jobs in Glasgow's NHS this year, more than half of which are nurse and midwife posts. Is that what the First Minister calls protecting our NHS?

The First Minister: NHS spending in Scotland this year is higher in real terms than it was in previous years, despite the £500 million of cuts. There is a theory currently abroad that the reason why so many Labour MPs preferred opposition to government and were unwilling to allow the talks on a Labour-Liberal Democrat progressive alliance to progress—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: —is that they wanted to spend the next five years absolving themselves of any responsibility for the economic crisis that they visited on this country and the huge public spending cuts to come. Is there anybody on the Labour benches who really does not know that the Labour Party's own plans, in presenting cuts that were to be tougher and deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher, involved £25 billion of public spending cuts in Scotland over the next 10 to 15 years? Are we really being presented with the alibi that it is all the fault of the Tories and the Liberal Democrats?

Iain Gray: No, the health board cuts are the First Minister's fault. The document that I hold makes it clear who asked for this plan: it was the Scottish Government health department, on 9 April. Nicola Sturgeon is not letting those cuts happen; she is demanding them of the health board. If voters had known what that lot are up to, they would not have given them six seats never mind 20. Yes, there are £6 billion of cuts coming from the Con-Dem parties over there, but this is the alliance that Alex Salmond is part of: cuts, cuts, cuts.

Yesterday, Alex Salmond wrote to David Cameron, telling him that he does not want cuts here. Can I suggest that he uses his mighty hand to write to his Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to tell her that we do not want her cuts in our hospitals?

The First Minister: When the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer promised at the start of the election campaign that the cuts would be coming and that they would be tougher and deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher, he was not talking about the cuts to come from the Conservatives and the Liberals. He was talking about the cuts under the Labour Party. When the Labour Party said to the people, "Vote Labour and we'll stop the Tories," it forgot to mention that it was going to lose 100 seats south of the border and that a Tory Government would come, regardless of how Scotland voted.

When I meet the Prime Minister in the very near future, would it not be a tremendous asset if I was able to say that the Scottish Government and the leading Opposition party in Scotland are united in wanting Scotland to have capital acceleration, borrowing powers, the £180 million fossil fuel levy and the Olympic consequentials that should be running into the Scottish economy? All those things were denied us by a Labour Administration in Westminster. However, unencumbered by the guilt of office at Westminster, surely our Opposition leader can now join with the Government in asking on behalf of Scotland that those things are done to revive the economy and protect our vital public services.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister, David Cameron. (S3F-2387)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I think that Annabel Goldie knows the answer to that question: I expect to meet the Prime Minister in the very near future.

Annabel Goldie: I hope that the First Minister will try to have a better working relationship with the new Prime Minister than he had with the

previous one. Scotland has been badly served by the First Minister's politics of gripe and grievance over the past three years. His attitude has damaged the relationship between our Governments and our Parliaments.

I know that the Prime Minister has already spoken to the First Minister—thankfully, unlike the previous two Prime Ministers, the current one knows how to use a phone—and will meet him very soon. When they meet, will the First Minister welcome the fact that our new Government will scrap Labour's job tax, scrap Labour's identity cards, keep the winter fuel allowance, keep free television licences for over-75s, keep child benefit, increase pensions, reform our banks, protect our armed forces abroad and do so much more? Will he work with the new politics and abandon his grin and his whinge?

The First Minister: When I meet the Prime Minister in the very near future, I will argue that a respect agenda must be justified by deeds and actions as well as words. If we can get the support of the Conservative party for the arguments for capital acceleration, for borrowing powers for the Scottish Parliament, for the £180 million fossil fuel levy and for the Olympics consequentials—which are being claimed not just by the Scottish Government but by the Administrations in Northern Ireland and Wales—that will be a respect agenda.

Hard things are often said in politics, but the strongest thing that I heard in the election campaign was somebody saying that a cleg bite swells up, hurts for a few days and then goes back down. It looks as though Annabel Goldie is going to have the Clegg bite for some time to come.

Annabel Goldie: Oh well, there is nothing that a little Tory antihistamine does not make a lot better. *[Laughter.]*

Enormous challenges face our country. Scotland's unemployment rate is now higher than that of the United Kingdom—that is Labour's jobs legacy on top of Labour's debt legacy—and we need to deal with the consequences of Labour's failure. Our new British Government has a job to do, but so does the First Minister: he needs to knuckle down and play his part. What plans does his Government have to deal with Labour's legacy? Will he make economies? If so, what are they? Alternatively, does he plan to raise taxes—is that his secret plan?

The First Minister: I heard on the radio this morning that 90 per cent of economists believe that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are about to raise VAT to 20 per cent. I do not know whether that is a secret plan or whether it is now an open plan of the new Government but, if I were Annabel Goldie, I would be careful in talking about

either public spending cuts, which seem to be the emphasis of the new Administration, or tax rises, which seem to be one of the options of the new Administration.

When the proposals that are put forward are in the interests of Scotland, I will welcome them. For example, I have already welcomed the announcement that children are no longer to be held in detention at Dungavel—that is a welcome announcement. However, in respect of the central features of economic and political policy in Scotland, I believe that the Scottish economy needs not immediate cuts in public spending but capital investment and a stimulus package to fight the recession. All of us have our political differences, but we have a shared responsibility for the future of the Scottish economy and I hope that the things that I have mentioned to Iain Gray and Annabel Goldie are supported across the chamber. For example, during the election campaign, one of the parties in the new coalition Government at Westminster said that there would be £240 million of additional spending in Scotland this year. I take it that we can now prepare John Swinney to allocate that money to investment in jobs and the Scottish economy. When we have productive policies that are in the interests of the Scottish people, the Scottish Government will support them. However, Annabel Goldie would expect the Scottish Government to advance the cause of Scotland at all times, and the things that I have listed are very much in the interests of Scotland.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S3F-2388)

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

Tavish Scott: Yesterday, a new United Kingdom Government was formed. The new Liberal Democrat Secretary of State for Scotland's first call was to the First Minister, and the new Government has already announced that the shameful and unacceptable detention of children at the Dungavel detention centre will end. Labour had 13 years in which to do that, yet, as its term in office ended in March, we saw reports of six-year-old children being taken in their school uniforms from their Glasgow school to Dungavel. Was that not a shameful end to a Labour Government? Does the First Minister agree that, with the ending of the detention of children at Dungavel, the right policy change for Scotland is being introduced by a UK Government?

The First Minister: I agreed on that matter in my answer to Annabel Goldie before Tavish Scott

asked the question. Of course I agree that it is a welcome change of policy. Most humane people across the political spectrum in Scotland would share that opinion. I hope that this welcome change of policy will also be reflected in the economic policies of the new Administration. Page 103 of the Liberal Democrat manifesto promises that £240 million of additional spending will be invested in the Scottish economy. When I met Vince Cable just before the election campaign, he assured me that that would be the case. Now that he is at the heart of economic management at Westminster, can we assume that it will indeed be the case?

Tavish Scott: It makes a nice change to be asked questions. I am more than happy to respond and I am sure that Mr Salmond will look forward to his meetings with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Figures suggest that more than 100 children were detained at Dungavel last year. That is a year after Labour said that it would stop the practice, which has been condemned by HM chief inspector of prisons in Scotland, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Scotland's churches and members of Parliament on all sides. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Tavish Scott: Now that the UK Government policy is changing and children are no longer to be detained behind razor wire at Dungavel—Liberal Democrats in government having made that happen—will the First Minister ensure that Scottish agencies and councils are able to work with the UK Government to educate, support and accommodate children? Is he ready to work for that fundamental change?

The First Minister: Yes—obviously we will, just as we tried to persuade the previous Westminster Administration that there were proper alternatives to the detention of children. Tavish Scott will get no argument from me about that. He has heard me many times as First Minister condemning the detention of children. Of course we will work to see better outcomes for families in that extreme position in Scotland. We all know of the tragedies that have unfolded as a result of the particular pressures on asylum seekers and their families.

Whether he wants to ask the questions or answer them, I refer Tavish Scott to the parts of the Liberal Democrat manifesto that would enable policy to be formed not just with a view to people in Scotland who are suffering from a degree of difficulty and oppression but across the wider economy. The people of Scotland will want to know whether there will be investment in the economy and in public services in the coming year. That is a matter that the Liberal Democrats

will not be able to dodge, be it here at First Minister's question time or elsewhere.

The Presiding Officer: We will take a supplementary question from Andy Kerr.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the tragic murder of 16-year-old Jack Frew in East Kilbride last week. I am sure that our thoughts are with his family and friends at this time. Indeed, the whole town is devastated by his death. I give recognition to the school staff and others who have been dealing with the trauma of many young people in East Kilbride. It was a knife crime and, as a nation, we need to tackle that very subject. What more can we do as a nation, and as communities, to tackle knife crime?

The First Minister: Let me extend the commiserations, I hope, of the whole chamber for the tragedy that has befallen Andy Kerr's constituent. There is huge sympathy, and it goes across parties, for families in these circumstances.

As Andy Kerr knows, a range of policies has been rolled out against knife crime. The violence reduction unit has been doing extremely good work and there have been a number of successes, but knife crime is still a major problem and a major issue in society. We express again our condolences to Andy Kerr's constituents.

Economic Recovery

4. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the signs of economic recovery in Scotland highlighted in the latest Bank of Scotland purchasing managers' index report. (S3F-2398)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We welcome the latest PMI report, which suggests that Scottish private sector output expanded in April for the 10th consecutive month. However, it must be recognised that recovery remains fragile and the recession continues to have devastating effects on individuals and families throughout Scotland. That is why this is not the time to withdraw fiscal stimulus measures but the time to find means of investing in Scottish economic recovery.

Joe FitzPatrick: Under the previous Conservative Government and under the Liberal-Labour coalition in Holyrood, unemployment in Scotland was frequently higher than the United Kingdom average. What steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure that Westminster does not damage the Scottish recovery and put Scots' jobs at risk? Will the First Minister press the new UK Government to allow accelerated capital spending, which would protect jobs in my constituency and across Scotland?

The First Minister: In the absence of agreement to capital acceleration and stimulus measures, the Scottish Government has made a number of announcements over recent weeks on the deployment of European funding, both from the European regional development fund and from the European social fund. That funding will protect and increase thousands of jobs in Scotland and extend training opportunities to some 80,000 people throughout the country.

Joe FitzPatrick is right that, if we want to do something significant about the state of Scotland's economy this year so as to lead the economy into recovery, issues such as capital acceleration, borrowing powers, the fossil fuel levy and Olympics consequential should be at the centre of what we ask for from the incoming Westminster Government. If we could do that as a Parliament united in the belief that such measures would be good for Scotland, our arguments would have more force than if we act on a party-political basis. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the four measures that I have mentioned are not the right thing for Scotland at the present moment. If they are the right thing for Scotland, surely all parties in the Parliament should be able to support them.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): Of course, the First Minister fails to mention the Scottish Futures Trust, which has cost 30,000 jobs. I would be happy to work with him in getting rid of that.

Gross domestic product growth in Scotland is worse than in the rest of the UK. Projected growth in Scotland is worse than in the rest of the UK. Scotland has suffered a steeper fall in output than the rest of the UK for the first time since the second world war. The First Minister's last economic fig leaf was his repeated claim that unemployment was lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. Sadly, we have found out that that is no longer the case. Does not the removal of that last economic fig leaf reveal the Salmond slump and the failure of his policies? Is it not true that the Scottish National Party manifesto promised that Scotland would be the most competitive nation in the UK? Why is that not happening?

The First Minister: Labour was in power in Scotland for 96 months. In 85 of those 96 months, unemployment in Scotland was higher than the UK average. I am sorry to remind Andy Kerr of that little bit of history, but nonetheless—*[Interruption.]* Andy Kerr may dispute the point but, in the 96 months of the Labour-Liberal Administration, unemployment was lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK in only 11 months. That is 11 months out of 96.

I am glad that Andy Kerr has allowed me the opportunity to knock down one of his other canards. His argument about the reasons for the

fall in construction employment is based on the idea that there has been a collapse in private finance initiative/public-private partnership deals. Of course, that is absolutely correct. Between 2007-08 and the following year, there was a decline of 67 per cent in the number of PFI/PPP deals in Scotland. Over the same period in England, the decline was 86 per cent. The reason for the decline, as Andy Kerr should understand, is that one of the many deficiencies of PFI/PPP as a funding mechanism is that, in a credit crunch, the PFI providers will not supply the funds.

Medical Records

5. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government will take to better protect medical records. (S3F-2401)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We expect the highest standards of data security from everyone working in the national health service. We are continually working with health boards to improve data security. The Scottish Government set tough new rules for health boards 18 months ago that made clear that patient-identifiable data must not be stored on unencrypted memory sticks or laptops. Some £1 million was given to boards to make those changes. Medical records are the legal responsibility of the NHS boards that hold them. All members of staff should be aware of their responsibilities for data security. Storing patient-sensitive data on an unencrypted memory stick is a clear breach of those responsibilities.

Jackie Baillie: The action that was taken 18 months ago has obviously proved to be insufficient. The most recent incident of which the First Minister will be aware is the discovery in a supermarket car park of a memory stick containing intimate details of patients and staff from part of NHS Forth Valley. The First Minister will be aware that that follows other incidents of boxes of medical records lying unattended in public corridors in the Southern general hospital, patient information, including X-rays, being scattered around Law hospital and documents being left lying around Strathmartine hospital, in the constituency of the Minister for Public Health and Sport in Dundee. Does the First Minister agree that effective action has not yet been taken by all parts of the NHS in Scotland? What will he do now to ensure the security of confidential patient records?

The First Minister: I do not agree with that. The statistics, which I have in front of me, show that these matters have improved substantially in Scotland since the changes were introduced. Jackie Baillie should know that our record is much better than that of the previous Administration. I also have comparative figures for data lost south

of the border and can say that the record in Scotland is incomparably better than that south of the border. The rules were changed and tightened up 18 months ago because they were not up to scratch and changes had to be made. However, no change in the rules is immune to a breach by an individual member of staff. When that happens, an inquiry follows and the appropriate action is taken. Every available statistic shows that the rule changes that were introduced 18 months ago have resulted in substantial improvement. I know that it is not in Jackie Baillie's nature to acknowledge such things, but she should look at the statistics.

Fishing Industry

6. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to support Scotland's fishing fleet and help avoid the early closure of fisheries. (S3F-2395)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): In spite of the cuts imposed by the common fisheries policy, we are working closely with the industry to help skippers to spread their fishing across the whole year as we did last year. We expect normal fishing patterns to prevail in most parts of the industry. In the white-fish sector, we are now working to give fishermen more time at sea in return for new fish conservation initiatives, to increase the likelihood of achieving a 12-month fishery.

The Scottish Government will also make strong representations to the United Kingdom Government that the common fisheries policy is broken and should be scrapped. I know that the member's party leader has called for ending the CFP in the past. In his new position of influence and responsibility, I am sure that he will join us and give us reinforcement in making that call.

Liam McArthur: No one seriously disputes the need for reform of the CFP, and a more regional approach to fisheries management is indeed essential but, however much the First Minister or his fisheries secretary might wish it otherwise, that will not happen immediately. Scottish fishermen recognise that, so they want to know how Scottish ministers plan to address the serious problems that they are facing this year. Is the First Minister aware of the warning from Scottish producer organisations and fish processors that if fisheries have to close early because of a lack of quota or a lack of days at sea, that will spell economic disaster for the catching and processing sectors in Scotland? Will he further accept that there is a risk of displacement of vessels from more distant and viable fisheries, which will put pressure on stocks in other areas? In light of that, will he give a specific commitment today that his Government will not cut the days at sea allocated to white-fish vessels?

The First Minister: We are working hard with the industry, particularly on positive action to reduce the number of discards. The basic difficulty with the common fisheries policy is the fact that half the fish that are caught are discarded dead into the sea. The measures that we are taking on conservation credits are designed to allow fishermen to catch fewer fish but land more of them. That is a great part of the solution to the economic pressures that are currently being faced by the industry.

Liam McArthur should understand that, within the confines of the common fisheries policy to which his Government at Westminster is currently signed up, we are restrained in days at sea and quota allocations. I merely make this point to him: if fishing is a priority for the Liberal Democrats, why is it that nowhere in the "Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition negotiations: Agreements reached" document can be found the word "fishing" or any mention of the common fisheries policy? No doubt Liam McArthur, even retrospectively, can get on to his negotiators and have fishing established for the first time in generations as a priority of the Westminster Government.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes questions to the First Minister. I remind members that we now move to members' business and that they should depart the chamber quietly.

Bluelight

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6233, in the name of Jim Tolson, on the bluelight initiative. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the highly successful and well regarded youth engagement initiative, Bluelight, which aims to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour and build positive police, youth and community partnerships through a range of alcohol and drug-free youth events and programmes; notes that the Bluelight concept was first introduced into Scotland in Dunfermline in 2004, having been modelled on the successful youth programmes in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific, and that projects have now been established in all Scottish police force areas; congratulates the partners involved in the delivery of Bluelight in Fife, including Fife Constabulary, Fife Council, NHS Fife, Community Volunteers, Fife Fire and Rescue Service, Carnegie College and many members from voluntary sector agencies, on the success of the initiative, and believes that Bluelight is a valuable and effective initiative that should be developed further in communities across Scotland.

12:31

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): Bluelight is a youth initiative that originated in Australia in 1975. It was a response to growing problems associated with drunkenness at youth discos and the impact of antisocial behaviour on the surrounding communities. The initiative spread throughout Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and it has a significant impact on youth-related crime in the areas in which it operates.

In 2004, a delegation from the Fife boozebusters group was invited to make a presentation to a World Health Organization conference in Melbourne in Australia. Three of its biggest champions from Scotland—Allan Stewart, Fraser Laird and Bill Young—join us in the public gallery today.

The delegates, including a health promotions officer, a community constable and a locality manager from Fife Council, were made aware of the bluelight concept after making contact with Victoria Police. They decided that bluelight would begin to address some of the issues that are faced in Fife and that it could be easily replicated, given the degree of partnership working that was already in place among the key agencies.

A steering group was set up in Dunfermline, including representatives from the police, NHS Fife, local licence holders, Fife Council, elected members, local community groups, Fife Fire and Rescue Service and local voluntary groups. A

commitment was given to pilot the initiative over a six-month period to gauge its effectiveness.

The problem of youth disorder and alcohol abuse has been around for many years. In addition to alcohol sales to minors, many of the problems were due to the lack of an attractive alternative to drinking, to the fact that young people were afraid to be alone and therefore felt more comfortable gathering in groups, and to a lack of trust between young people and many of the public agencies. Through a variety of consultative events, the idea of bluelight was put to young people, who were very receptive to it.

Bluelight events are held on a Friday night and target the secondary 1 to 4 age group. Venues tend to be neutral—a local college or community centre, for example. The ticket price is just £1 to keep the event affordable to all, and it includes free travel to and from the event on Stagecoach buses.

On the night of the event, all young people who enter the venue are searched and breathalysed. That gives assurances to both the youngsters and their parents that there will be no drunken behaviour on the premises. The events generally run between 7 pm and 11 pm, and when bluelight finishes at 11 pm the vast majority of attendees go directly home.

A major aspect of bluelight is the chill-out room, which serves two functions. First, it allows the young people to spend time with their friends in a quieter and more comfortable area. Secondly, it provides partners with precious opportunities to consult, interact and generally build up relationships with the young people.

However, it is not all discos. Fife Constabulary's youth diversion initiative, operation lifeline, takes place at the Army's Barry Buddon training area near Dundee. Run in partnership with Her Majesty's forces Army youth training team, it runs outdoor activities for young volunteers that provide them with the resilience and maturity that enable them to carry out the tasks that they are set with a sense of responsibility and pride. I will visit the initiative later this year.

A range of community and voluntary partners run the bluelight scheme. All partners and volunteers are required to undergo a full enhanced disclosure check.

Since 2004, more than 30,000 young people have attended events in Fife—15,000 in Dunfermline alone—and only two have failed the breath test. Bluelight events in Dunfermline have shown a 13 per cent reduction in vandalism and nuisance calls on the nights of the events, compared with other nights. Similar trends are evident in relation to other events in Fife, and

police report that hot spots within the areas are noticeably quieter on the nights of the events.

Bluelight has won Fife Constabulary's problem-oriented policing—POP—award and the prestigious Radio Forth contribution to communities award, and was a runner up in Fife's excellence awards and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' excellence awards.

It is clear that bluelight is in an embryonic stage in Scotland. To achieve any meaningful development for our communities, it will require governmental recognition, which will help to create non-governmental support. The police, through the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, should be the lead party in the initiative, with a group of senior officers representing all forces in Scotland. They should be dedicated to establishing a unified strategy for bluelight. All serving police officers and new recruits should be given training and encouragement to be involved in bluelight activities.

On a gradual basis, which can be based upon a feasibility study for each stage, bluelight in Scotland can grow to be an initiative of a similar size to the scheme in New Zealand.

I urge the minister to attend a bluelight event in Dunfermline with me and to see for himself how this highly effective youth diversion activity operates.

12:37

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I congratulate Jim Tolson on securing this debate. One wise colleague suggested that a Liberal Democrat lunchtime debate bearing the name "bluelight" might be misinterpreted in the spirit of the new Conservative-Liberal consensus, but that is not the case as far as I am concerned, and I want to put firmly on the record the worth of the bluelight initiative. There can be no better example of good-quality communication at community level than that which exists between the partners who are involved in the delivery of bluelight in Fife, including Fife Constabulary, Fife Council, NHS Fife, community volunteers, Fife Fire and Rescue Service, Carnegie College and many members from voluntary sector agencies.

As all parties have asserted many times in this chamber, volunteers and voluntary organisations play a vital role in ensuring that we all live in a stronger and more cohesive society. They do an outstanding job. However, to enhance that support, we believe that more can be done to promote the interaction between public and social services and the voluntary sector, with each taking advantage of each other's strengths.

The bluelight initiative has already established itself as a well-regarded youth engagement initiative in Fife and across other Scottish police force areas, working to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour through a range of alcohol and drug-free youth events and programmes, as Jim Tolson said.

Drug abuse threatens the very fabric of our society. It destroys lives, tears families apart, leads to widespread and recurring crime and to the disintegration of entire communities. It is therefore essential that we must harness not only all the resources of the state but the goodwill and determination of communities not only to discourage drug abuse but to do everything possible to eliminate it. Financial resources can do only so much. What we really need is a change of attitudes, and positive youth and community partnerships such as bluelight can only help to achieve this aim.

The Parliament firmly believes that we can often learn from best practice in other countries; the bluelight initiative is an example of such an approach, having been modelled on successful youth programmes in Australia, New Zealand and the south Pacific. I hope such positive approaches can be developed in other policy areas too.

I have long advocated the need to engage more with our young people and to develop positive youth engagement initiatives throughout Scotland in order to address what is often seen as the problem of our disengaged youth. It is easy for politicians to stand here and in other places and talk, but it is the hard work of the many thousands of youth workers and volunteers that day in and day out provides positive support for young people throughout Scotland, often in difficult circumstances. I welcome the steering group that has been set up by the Scottish Government to provide strategic direction and to ensure collaboration between the many partners that are needed to make leadership activity effective. The voluntary sector will be free to come up with innovative solutions to the social problems that face our society only if it is truly independent and autonomous of Government, albeit with crucial Government support.

In my area, many smaller groups already provide additional youth and community opportunities. The youth group @spire has proved to be hugely successful and gives young people in the communities in places such as Milnathort, Kinnesswood and Scotlandwell something to do every Tuesday, in the Milnathort church hall. Youth worker Hannah Pickles provides a youth drop-in service to give support and advice for young people, especially those from the rural community.

The bluelight initiative has established itself as a fine example of partnership working in the voluntary sector. I hope that we will be able to go further in the future and develop strong partnerships. The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly called for a longer-term strategic review of social work services and how those services can utilise the expertise of the voluntary sector in dealing with some of the most profound issues in our communities. I firmly agree with Jim Tolson that bluelight is a valuable and effective initiative that should be developed further in communities throughout Scotland. Nationally, there is variability in funding for such youth services, and there is a real need to improve efficiency and effectiveness. I hope that the minister will comment further on that at the end of the debate.

12:41

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Jim Tolson on bringing the debate to Parliament and I welcome the opportunity to highlight the initiative that has been shown by Fife's hard-working police officers—it is often the dedication and enthusiasm of one officer that drives such projects forward—and by their partners in taking forward the bluelight project. We in Fife are proud of our forward-thinking police force, which is committed to finding community-based solutions to the many challenges that communities face. The problem of youth disorder is not new, but Fife police and their partners have recognised the need for new solutions. Fife Constabulary is often at the forefront of progressive policing aimed at tackling underage drinking and antisocial behaviour. It has a track record of taking the lead, having been at the forefront of test purchasing in Scotland. It is also prepared to give new solutions, such as bottle marking, a trial. However, it is making an especially positive contribution with the effort that it is putting into the bluelight initiative, which is having great success. The initiative was imported from Australia and New Zealand, where it has been successful for more than 25 years. Fife officers saw its potential and successfully adapted it for Fife.

As Jim Tolson has outlined, in 2004, local police and partners began a six-month pilot, with the first bluelight disco in Dunfermline. Since then, more than 30,000 young people have attended a range of bluelight events throughout Fife. The events are targeted at high-school pupils, and tickets, which are sold in advance, include the cost of safe travel to the event.

Too many communities in Fife struggle with varying levels of youth disorder, particularly at the weekends. Bluelight has been successful because it provides young people with what they want—an

opportunity to socialise, relax in a safe environment and engage in age-appropriate activities—their idea of that and ours are sometimes different. Bluelight goes a long way in providing the kind of activities that young people are looking for. It encourages independence and good decision making among young people. The growth of the bluelight projects in Fife has allowed an expansion in the services that can be provided. In Levenmouth, the street:live project has grown out of the bluelight initiative and has an excellent reputation.

When I was first elected, I was impressed by the commitment that was being shown by Fife police to bluelight and I inquired about the correlation between bluelight events and community safety. The figures are impressive: in some areas, there has been a drop of up to 80 per cent in calls to the police when a bluelight event is on. It is about much more than simply putting on a disco for under-18s. Following the success of bluelight, some commercially run clubs have tried to offer an evening for under-18s, but those tend to finish at about 9 o'clock when, for most young people, the night is still young, and they might go on to get hold of alcohol, get drunk, become involved in antisocial behaviour and create disturbances—and sometimes worse—in their communities.

Bluelight discos, however, are much more sophisticated. They go on until 11 pm and young people are encouraged to go home afterwards; entry is controlled and those who have been drinking are unable to get in; and the police will often call on the support of an agency such as the Drug & Alcohol Project Ltd to address the young person's relationship with alcohol. Each event is staffed by police officers, youth workers, health workers and volunteers and opportunities are provided to build relationships with young people.

We will all agree that the bluelight project is a good thing and should be properly supported. Unlike in Australia, however, the Scottish project does not have significant sponsorship and there is a high reliance on volunteers. I certainly hope that the minister will consider Fife Constabulary's recommendations. It would be good if this successful project could be developed throughout Scotland and I hope that ACPOS can be encouraged to play a full role in that respect.

As we will all agree, this type of cohesive approach to tackling underage drinking and resultant antisocial behaviour should be welcomed and supported. I am very pleased to acknowledge the remarkably positive results in Fife thanks to the dedication of local police officers and their many partners.

12:46

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Jim Tolson on publicising the bluelight initiative.

The debate has made me reflect on my own experiences of teaching kids as a further education lecturer way back in the 1960s. I used to be confronted with Post Office messenger boys, who ran around on little red motorbikes, delivering telegrams, and who were said to be the most intractable pupils in Edinburgh. In fact, I found that seemingly tough lot to be brilliant, because the work was based around the mechanical thing they worked with—in other words, their bikes. They also had to interact in complex social situations. After all, in Scottish working-class households, telegrams meant no good, and these 16 and 17-year-olds had to be prepared to deal with moving situations involving illness and death and to empathise with people who could become distracted as such news approached.

Youngsters and teenagers have the capability to overcome the situations in which they are placed, and bluelight is the sort of initiative that can stimulate in teenagers the liveliness and interest in the world that are shown, as Jim Tolson and I will recall, by primary school kids. Those tend to lapse in the early teen years, when young people become driven much more by the pressure of seeing their lives expand and not being able to cope with that, partly because of their time of life and partly because of peer-group pressure. The bluelight movement's emphasis on ensuring that teenagers see authority as something that not only disciplines but provides further opportunities is surely important. It casts back to the 1880s and the curious movement that led to the explorer Henry Drummond helping to set up the Boys Brigade, the two propellant areas behind which were the gospel according to Moody and Sankey, and association football. In the BB, if one was not a good football organiser, one was sunk.

That type of initiative still makes an impact—for instance, the Scout Association is very strong in Kirkcaldy—and is founded on people simply not giving way to what might be described as a combination of girning and trying to find quick and easy ways out of a situation. All too often, such quick and easy ways involve the product of one of Fife's major industries—the alcopops that are churned out of the Diageo works near Leven—but that kind of reaction can be overcome not only by discipline but by the opportunity for real enjoyment that bluelight provides.

I would certainly like to see supermarkets and alcohol producers being made to balance their profit making with social responsibility and ensuring that people have the chance truly to mature.

Another development that I would like is to get people who are going into higher education to do a year's part-time work with organisations that work with young people. That would give them leadership and organisational skills and the ability to generate interest among kids. Kids have many chances and the potential to use much technology; they just require access to people who have a notion of being teachers and mentors. The bluelight initiative is an important first step in that direction. I hope that all means of developing it can be pursued.

12:50

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. As other members have done, I congratulate Jim Tolson on bringing the motion to the chamber and on highlighting the effectiveness of the bluelight initiative and the way in which it has negated the impact of antisocial behaviour in Fife. That has come across clearly in the experiences of the various Fife members who have spoken.

In general, members are well aware of the negative effects that antisocial behaviour can have on their communities. Recently, there was a 31 per cent rise in the number of antisocial behaviour penalties issued in the Strathclyde area. Added to that, the 2009 social attitudes survey demonstrated that 70 per cent of people in Scotland have witnessed some form of antisocial behaviour and that 87 per cent reckon that it is a major or serious problem. However, we need to do more than quote statistics on antisocial behaviour; we need to consider the human impact on communities. Pensioners are afraid to leave their homes because they have a feeling of fear and are worried about what might be visited upon them by people who perpetrate antisocial behaviour. Obviously, such behaviour is unacceptable and there is a need to combat it.

From that point of view, the bluelight initiative is welcome. As Jim Tolson said, although it was pioneered internationally and has been set up in Dunfermline, it is starting to have an impact throughout Scotland. A successful bluelight event, which was praised by local police and stakeholders, has been held in Larkhall in Lanarkshire.

The initiative has several key advantages. First, it tackles crime and antisocial behaviour. As Jim Tolson said, on the nights when the discos take place, activity in the hot spots decreases significantly. As Claire Baker pointed out, because the events continue until 11 o'clock, there is a greater chance that those attending will go home when they leave, rather than participate in unsavoury activities. The initiative also does a lot to involve young people and reinforces the strong

education message that we want them to be model citizens who respect others in society.

Because the events are alcohol and drug free, they reinforce a message that we are trying to get across in schools. Recent drug statistics have indicated the alarming fact that youngsters under the age of 15 are starting to be admitted to hospital as a result of taking drugs. At a recent meeting of the Public Audit Committee, health board chiefs said that the same trend is starting to appear in relation to alcohol. It is good to see multi-agency working, with people from various agencies participating in the events and talking to young people.

The format is excellent and should be rolled out throughout Scotland. However, that should be linked to general Government support and strong action on antisocial behaviour. We need to assess the effectiveness of the current legislation and be proactive in tackling the negative impacts of antisocial behaviour.

I again congratulate Jim Tolson on the motion and on highlighting the initiative, which I hope is successfully rolled out throughout Scotland.

12:54

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): I congratulate Jim Tolson on bringing forward this excellent debate. The contributions from all members illustrate well the value of effective programmes to divert young people from problematic behaviour of various types.

I took the opportunity to read the document by Mr Young—who I believe is here to listen to the debate—entitled “Bluelight—A Comprehensive Programme for Youth and Community Partnership”. It was interesting to read the history of the development of the scheme and the approach taken by other countries over the 35 years since it was first devised in Australia. I say to Jim Tolson that I have noted the recommendations and will consider them. We are of course carrying out a great deal of work in this area. I will specifically consider the general issue with ACPOS, because the principal recommendation, as I understand it, is that the police should be in charge of developing the schemes.

The debate has been excellent. Jim Tolson and Claire Baker have given some detail about how the programme operates in Fife, its benefits and one or two pointers on how it could be further developed.

The Scottish Government is wholly committed to offering young people more choices and chances. Of the minority of young people who get into trouble, four fifths do not get into trouble again

after a visit from the police to them or their parents. That is enough—I suspect that parental discipline kicks in. An appreciation by youngsters that they have perhaps done something daft is also important. We are simply talking about a minority of a minority who are a serious problem in Scotland. It is very important to say that and not to portray the false picture that all young people are somehow a problem. The opposite is the case: most young people in Scotland are a credit to their families, their schools and themselves.

However, we need to focus on the minority, and we have done so. That is why, working with people such as Harry McGuigan and Barbara Grant in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we have produced “Promoting Positive Outcomes: Working Together to Prevent Antisocial Behaviour in Scotland”, the framework for tackling antisocial behaviour, which recognises the key role of diversion. Someone more scholarly might correct me, but I believe that the word “divert” comes from the Latin word for to turn aside. That is what we hope to do with diversion schemes of all types—to turn aside youngsters from the wrong path to the right one.

Members have described a number of particular problems. Elizabeth Smith and James Kelly both mentioned drugs, which is one of the most serious problems facing our society today. How much better it is to prevent young people from trying drugs in the first place and to give them the information that they need in order to know that that is a very dangerous path to take. Our new drugs strategy, “The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland’s Drug Problem”, fully recognises that that is important.

As far as I can recollect, the most recent available information of young people’s behaviour, which comes from the Scottish schools adolescent lifestyle and substance use survey, indicates that although there is a serious problem, which I by no means belittle, the figures show that there is perhaps a 10 per cent reduction in the number of teenagers who are trying drugs and using them regularly. That is by no means good enough. There is much more work to be done and I am delighted that all parties are united behind that.

The abuse of alcohol affects more youngsters and causes more types of problematic behaviour, which can cause extreme misery to many vulnerable people, such as elderly people, who tend to be on the receiving end of such behaviour, as we all know from helping constituents. That is why the Government is wholly committed to providing more choices and chances for young people. It is why we have invested £14 million through cashback for communities in a range of projects through, for example, the Scottish Football Association, which is providing football

opportunities; the Scottish Rugby Union, which is providing rugby opportunities; basketballscotland; and YouthLink Scotland. This week, I was very pleased indeed to announce the junction project, which will provide intensive personal development skills for those who are on the cusp of offending. It is perhaps one of the few schemes—if not the only scheme—on which I have advocated that additional taxpayers' money should be spent. I therefore have a personal interest in ensuring that it is successful.

I know from work with people such as Elizabeth Smith that members across the chamber share my views about the importance of taking youngsters whom the police identify as likely to cause serious trouble—who might end up in Barlinnie or die early through addiction—and giving them a chance in life to see that a better way exists. That is why the word “junction” is used—the aim is to choose a better path.

Several speakers have acknowledged that many different approaches to diversionary work exist. Not all youngsters will participate voluntarily in such activities, no matter how well organised and entertaining they are. A huge variety of activities is offered, from discothèques and parties to fishing expeditions, fun-park trips, father-and-son camps, triathlons and orienteering—I could go on. What about those who do not and will not turn up? We need to reach out to them, and we do so in projects such as street base in Hamilton, whereby youngsters go out to engage and chat with boys of roughly the same age group as them who are drinking Buckfast, saying, “Look—do you know that you can do this or that activity?”

The police and the fire service do a huge amount of work. Just yesterday evening, at Fettes police headquarters, I spoke to a special constable who does such work in Craigmillar and who sees many young lives turned around. Just this morning, I spoke to Brian Allaway, Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service's chief fire officer, who pointed to the cool-down crew work that firefighters do.

Throughout Scotland, our police, our fire service, our community workers, our voluntary groups, our scouts, our guides and our other groups do huge amounts of voluntary work, as many members have said. That work is rarely reported or heralded and—perhaps because of that—is not sufficiently widely appreciated, but I am sure that it helps youngsters to choose the right path in life. For all that work, we should be truly grateful.

At this time of somewhat controversial issues in politics, I am delighted that here in the Scottish Parliament at least, we have had a debate in which every party agrees on the right approach and the right way forward. I thank Jim Tolson for

giving us this valuable opportunity to express cross-party, non-political and non-partisan unity in supporting the aims and objectives of such work.

13:02

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Finance and Sustainable Growth

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Question 1 was not lodged.

Further Education Colleges (Funding)

2. Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding the need for additional funding for further education colleges. (S3O-10483)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Discussions between the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and I take place regularly on college funding issues.

Discussions took place before the announcement of a 6.9 per cent budget increase for the college sector for 2010-11. Further discussions took place before the announcement on 20 March of a further £6.9 million in European funding, helping to create more than 4,000 new college places. Discussions took place before the announcement on 14 April of an additional £17 million to support capital investment in colleges and provide a welcome boost to Scotland's construction industry.

Karen Whitefield: I am pleased that the cabinet secretary meets so regularly with his colleague, Michael Russell. Although I welcome the funding so far, does the cabinet secretary recognise that the additional funding will in no way address the permanent imbalance of college funding in Scotland? Is he aware that for every £5 spent on further education in Glasgow, only £2 is spent in Lanarkshire? I acknowledge the complex social and economic problems faced by Glasgow, but Lanarkshire shares exactly the same problems. What will the minister do to address that imbalance?

John Swinney: I think that Karen Whitefield will acknowledge from her experience of chairing the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee that decisions on the allocation of funding to colleges are taken by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, which takes those decisions independently of ministers, although it operates under a framework set out by ministers.

When funding colleges—this is particularly the case in the current environment, given the economic challenges that we face—the priority is to maximise the opportunities for young people and others in the economy who require further education opportunities. The funding arrangements that I set out in my earlier answer are designed to achieve that. I appreciate that there will be differences in the funding approaches taken by different areas, but such decisions are taken by the funding council to maximise the effectiveness and appropriateness of provision in all parts of the country.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Many of my constituents go to local colleges in order to access higher education institutions such as Glasgow Caledonian University, where a rally against cuts was held yesterday. Does the cabinet secretary believe that it is a good use of education funding for GCU bosses to spend more than £1 million on a campus in London while planning major cuts to funding in Scotland, meaning further job losses and a poorer standard of education?

John Swinney: Obviously, individual institutions, of which Glasgow Caledonian is one, must take decisions about the appropriate use of their resources. Our further and higher education institutions are involved in activities to encourage students from other parts of the United Kingdom and other countries to come to study in Scotland because it is an important revenue source to many of them. Although such decisions are best taken by the institutions, all of us who depend on public finance must take careful and prudent decisions to ensure that we maximise the effectiveness of public expenditure in an increasingly tight financial environment.

Cash-releasing Efficiency Savings

3. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will exceed its target of 2 per cent cash-releasing efficiency savings in 2010-11. (S3O-10494)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Annual efficiency outturn figures are published only when savings have been delivered and verified. The Government is working to deliver the target level of savings by the end of 2010-11.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response. The First Minister has said that the Scottish Government can achieve efficiency savings of 2 per cent per annum on an on-going basis to help to avoid cuts in front-line services. Does the finance secretary agree?

John Swinney: Yes, I agree. An essential part of how the Government acts is that it constantly

examines how we deliver public services and use public money to ensure that we maximise the effectiveness of all the resources that are available to us as we go into an environment in which they will be under enormous pressure. The Scottish Government's efficient government programme, which we are implementing and which our predecessors implemented in 2005 to 2008, has been an important part of sustaining that effort, and the Government will continue that in the years to come.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): The big difference is that for the word "efficiencies" we should read the word "cuts". I need look no further than the Audit Scotland report, "Improving public sector efficiency", which says:

"We have not attempted to validate independently the reported efficiency savings because the information to support reported savings is not complete or consistent."

We now know about education and health cuts. When will the cabinet secretary be honest with the Scottish people and tell them that, despite increasing budgets, his Government is cutting public services?

John Swinney: Not for the first time, we find ourselves in a situation in which Mr Kerr is arguing in opposition the absolute opposite of what he argued when he was a minister. Then, he would have said that he was not cutting public expenditure, but merely pursuing efficiency. That is exactly the approach that this Government is taking. We seek to ensure the maximum effective use of public money, and that is what the efficient government programme is about.

If he had read the Government's efficiency delivery plan, Mr Kerr would be aware that particular tests have to be applied to efficiency savings before any of them can be considered for inclusion in the efficient government programme.

Mr Kerr also asked me about the Audit Scotland report, so I will talk about the verification process. I rehearsed some of the arguments about that with Mr Gavin Brown at the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee meeting yesterday. We have to make a choice about how to validate the efficient government programme. We could do what we are doing and, as I said to Mr Gavin Brown yesterday, I am happy to work to strengthen the verification process in consultation with the Parliament. Alternatively, we could take the approach that could be suggested of using an excessive amount of bureaucracy to tabulate all the savings. That could be counterproductive and I do not intend to take that route. My predecessor Mr McCabe made exactly the same decision when he set out clearly and robustly to the Finance Committee in the previous parliamentary session that it was not appropriate to invent a large bureaucracy of bean counters—if I recollect

correctly, that was Mr McCabe's colourful choice of words. We will certainly take the same approach as that which Mr McCabe so thoughtfully set out to the Finance Committee back in 2005.

Business Rates

4. Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive what support it is providing to businesses in Edinburgh to help them cope with increased business rates. (S3O-10452)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): All businesses in Scotland, including those in Edinburgh, benefit by more than £200 million in 2010-11 from our decision to match the English poundage rate. On top of that, around 60 per cent of ratepayers in Scotland are better off after revaluation, even before appeals and reliefs reduce bills further, with an average annual saving of more than £1,300 per property. In England, where there is a transitional relief scheme, the reported average saving is £770.

Sarah Boyack: I thank the minister for his reply and for his recent letter to me. I have gone back to the Edinburgh business community, which remains adamant that, in the absence of a transitional relief scheme, the massive hikes in their business rates mean that many Edinburgh businesses are losing out severely, particularly in the retail and tourism industries. Is the minister prepared to meet me and the local chamber of commerce to look at the analysis of the work that it has done by talking to local businesses? In my constituency, for example, many businesses have lost out, even though the minister has not intended for that to be the case, and they are now facing a hike of up to 70 per cent in their rateable value and 43 per cent in business rates, to give just one retail example. Given that tourism is a £2 billion industry in Edinburgh, and rateable values have risen more than 40 per cent across the board, local businesses are very worried about the Edinburgh economy and the situation in Scotland as a whole.

John Swinney: I would be delighted to meet Sarah Boyack and the local chamber of commerce.

The Government considered a transitional relief scheme, but I decided not to take that route because implementing such a scheme would have deprived a significant number of businesses of the reductions in business rates to which the revaluation process indicated that they were entitled. In addition, it would not have prevented a range of businesses from facing increases in business rates. It is clear that there must be a cap on increases.

The judgment that I arrived at was predicated on the fact that we had taken a different approach to the revaluation process, in the sense that we had decided not to equalise the take from business rates that was expected post-revaluation with the pre-revaluation take. We decided to honour our commitment to match the English poundage rate, which has resulted in a saving of more than £200 million to the businesses affected.

I would be happy to explore some of those issues in detail. I make the final point that the first step for any business that is concerned about its business rate revaluation should be to appeal. I encourage businesses to do that—I am sure that the businesses to which Sarah Boyack referred have done that.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I want to ask the cabinet secretary about the overall yield from business rates taxation in Scotland since the Scottish National Party came to office.

In a written answer to a parliamentary question in March, the cabinet secretary replied that, net of all reliefs, the amount that businesses paid in rates in Scotland was £1.928 billion. In a written answer to me on 28 April, he said that the forecast for 2010-11 was that the yield from business rates would be £2.1 billion. Can he confirm that, since the SNP came to office, the amount that businesses in Scotland pay in rates has gone up by £170 million?

John Swinney: If that detail is contained in written answers, it will be correct.

I make the point that more money will be paid in business rates during a period of economic expansion. The period to which Mr Purvis refers is one in which we had sustained economic growth, so it was likely that an increase in the take from business rates would emerge. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Purvis mutters about the recession, but he will be aware that the payment of business rates can lag behind the period of economic activity. That explains the information that he has been given in written answers.

Economy (Fiscal Stimulus Programme)

5. Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will make representations to the United Kingdom Government for the restoration of a fiscal stimulus programme for the Scottish economy. (S30-10516)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): We must continue to support the economy and growth in employment at this crucial time.

I plan to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer—whom I congratulate on his appointment—at the earliest opportunity, and will call on him to ensure that the Scottish Government has all necessary resources to safeguard Scotland's economic recovery.

Christina McKelvie: Now that we live in this Con-Dem nation, does the cabinet secretary agree that the key issue for Scotland remains the need to secure the recovery? Is it not still the case that an acceleration of capital spending should be an essential part of the Scottish Government's arsenal for job creation and economic growth?

John Swinney: I certainly think that it is essential that we maintain investment in the public infrastructure of Scotland. The way in which we have deployed accelerated capital expenditure has helped us to take account of the fact that, recently, we have had a much lower level of private sector activity than we have had in recent years. The Government believes, as we asserted before and during the election, that a programme of accelerated capital expenditure would help to support the development of the economy. We will continue to make that case to the new ministers in the UK Government.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I am sure that the cabinet secretary will have noted the latest construction insolvency figures, which showed that in the fourth quarter of 2009, 22 construction companies in Scotland became insolvent. That number almost doubled to 42 in the first quarter of 2010.

I am sure that he will also have noted the slump in the number of jobs in the construction sector, which has been caused in no small part by the failure of the Scottish Futures Trust to get a single construction project shovel ready, as the saying goes. When will he get his act together by getting the Scottish Futures Trust to put some projects on the table that will get construction workers back to work?

John Swinney: It will be a very interesting parliamentary experience to listen to the unrelenting whine that is coming from the left-hand side of the chamber. If today is a taste of what lies ahead for the remainder of the session, it will be one big left-hand whine from the Labour crowd over there.

The Scottish Futures Trust is involved in about 15 different projects that are designed to support the development of infrastructure within the Scottish economy. A number of those projects are taking their course, whether on schools, the hub initiative, the Borders railway or the work on the Forth replacement crossing. A number of those projects involve the Scottish Futures Trust.

I will give Mr Whitton my usually helpful advice. If he is interested in playing a constructive role in the Parliament in the new political environment in which we are operating, the Labour Party should think about supporting the Government's approach to trying to secure investment in those self-same capital investment projects that he professes to be so concerned about but on which his party has failed to support the Government. We could make more progress in protecting employment and supporting business in Scotland if Mr Whitton and Mr Kerr were to support the Government more enthusiastically than has been the case to date.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): Should the fiscal stimulus be paid for by an increase in borrowing or an increase in taxation?

John Swinney: As Mr Brown will be aware, the last borrowing figures for the United Kingdom in the 2009-10 financial year showed that borrowing was £15 billion lower than the then Chancellor of the Exchequer had anticipated. The type of stimulus package that we are talking about would equate to a United Kingdom cost of about £3 billion. Clearly, a £15 billion borrowing requirement has been avoided, as a consequence of the performance of the economy. Our pitch to the former chancellor was that a proportion of that—I stress a proportion, and only 20 per cent—could have been used in a fiscal stimulus. I offer that helpful suggestion to Mr Brown, who I always knew was a very influential figure in politics but is now even more influential with the direct line that he will have to the United Kingdom Government. Mr Purvis also has his direct line to the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. We will not forget that one in a hurry.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): You are being rude.

John Swinney: I am not being rude. I am being as helpful as I possibly can be to encourage my colleagues in the Liberal Democrat and the Conservative parties to use all the new influence that they now have at their disposal.

Access for All Small Schemes Fund

6. Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government regarding proposed cuts to the access for all small schemes fund. (S30-10519)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): I wrote to Chris Mole, then Under Secretary of State for Transport, on 13 April 2010 expressing my

disappointment at the budget reduction, and urged him to reconsider the decision.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank the minister for that answer. He will already know that the access for all small schemes fund has made a small but very significant contribution to increasing access to our rail network for some of the most vulnerable in our society. From hand rails and variable height ticket counters to access ramps and sign language information, a lot of good progress has been made using that fund. However, much still needs to be done. May I therefore ask the minister to make further representations to the new UK Government to ensure that this decision, made in the death throes of the Labour Government, is reversed as soon as possible?

Stewart Stevenson: The access for all small schemes fund for 2010-11, which is provided by the Department for Transport at UK level, was originally set in October 2009 at £7.9 million. We received the information that it was being reduced to £3.9 million and the consequence was that our share fell from £796,000 to £390,000. As the member said, some of the most vulnerable people in our society are supported by this modest amount of money. It seems passing strange that a party whose rhetoric was committed to social justice should choose to make this small financial cut that will have a big impact. I will most certainly approach the new minister to see whether there can be a change of heart.

Scottish Budget (Cuts)

7. Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss the implications of any future cuts to the Scottish budget on the West of Scotland and Scotland in general. (S30-10517)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I plan to meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the implications of any future cuts to the Scottish budget. The Scottish Government will work to protect Scotland's interests in any future United Kingdom budget settlement and will continue to work in partnership with local authority, health service and other public sector colleagues to ensure that the resources that are ultimately allocated to us are used in the best interests of the people of Scotland.

Stuart McMillan: Bearing in mind the financial disaster that is the UK debt mountain created by Labour, and the impending savage cuts that are expected from the new Tory and Lib Dem UK Government, does the cabinet secretary agree with Labour's David Whitton that we should limit

free prescriptions, free pensioner travel and free school meals, which would adversely affect many people in Scotland whose lives we should be trying to improve?

John Swinney: I have not caught up with Mr Whitton's latest contribution to the debate, so I will leave his remarks to stand for themselves.

The approach that the Scottish Government will take in all its decisions, as I have made clear to the Parliament on a number of occasions, is to prioritise economic recovery and support front-line services. That will be the basis of the decisions that we take. We will examine the funding choices that the United Kingdom Government makes in formulating its decisions. I will keep the Parliament closely advised of the decisions that the Government makes once we have clear information about the financial settlement from the United Kingdom Government.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I should be flattered that Mr McMillan follows what I say in the press with such keen interest. However, it would help if he got his facts right. I did not say that I supported the ending of universal benefits. I see Mr Brownlee nodding in support of me.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is meant to be asking the cabinet secretary a question.

David Whitton: Indeed. I will get round to asking the question. *[Interruption.]* I was just defending—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you ask the question, please?

David Whitton: Indeed I will.

I did not call for the ending of all those things. *[Laughter.]* I am sure that the cabinet secretary will support me in that—or maybe not. Who knows? He will have to make the decisions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Whitton, ask a question!

David Whitton: The question is, if the cabinet secretary is so keen on defending those things, will he defend Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, which today declared 1,200 redundancies?

John Swinney: If Mr Whitton has been the inadvertent victim of a possible misquoting, I am sure that he has now put that well and truly on the record in the extensive and elaborate preparatory comment that we heard before his question. In doing so, however, he committed the same kind of offence of which he accuses my colleague Mr McMillan, because Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has done nothing of the sort that he suggested—nothing whatsoever.

Mr Whitton should reflect seriously on what approach should be taken to resolve the many difficulties that have been created by the mismanagement of the public finances by the Labour Government. All that Mr Whitton and Mr Kerr can do today is complain and whinge. I say to them that, if they carry on in that vein, they will marginalise themselves entirely from the political debate in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I hear my Liberal Democrat colleagues saying that they have done that already. Mr Whitton and Mr Kerr are well and truly on course to marginalise themselves and make themselves completely irrelevant as they try to deny the fact that the public spending crisis was created by the foolish management of our public finances by the Labour Party. That is why Labour is out of government at every level of the Scottish and UK Governments today.

Scottish Investment Fund Funding (Lanarkshire)

8. John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many third sector organisations based in Lanarkshire have successfully applied for funding from the Scottish investment fund since 1 September 2008. (S3O-10492)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): No Lanarkshire-based third sector organisations have received investment from the Scottish investment fund. Two applications were initiated but have not as yet been progressed further by the applicants.

John Wilson: The cabinet secretary will be aware that there was a high level of demand for investment from the fund. What consideration has been given to maintaining the Scottish investment fund beyond 2011?

John Swinney: As Mr Wilson will be aware, all questions about future budget decisions will be addressed when I deliver to the Parliament the financial settlement for 2011, the timing of which is subject to when we receive from the United Kingdom Government the information that is necessary to form a view.

The Scottish investment fund has been a popular funding stream. The fund is designed to encourage and support the sustainability of third sector organisations and has attracted a significant amount of interest. Mr Wilson should take reassurance from the fact that the Government values enormously the contribution that the fund can make to encourage sustainability in the third sector.

Business Rates Incentivisation Scheme

9. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made to

pilot a business rates incentivisation scheme across Scotland's local authorities. (S3O-10503)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Detailed discussions between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on how a business rates incentivisation scheme would operate are continuing, with the intention that an agreed scheme will be introduced in 2011-12.

Bob Doris: The cabinet secretary will know of my on-going interest in business rates collection by Glasgow City Council, whose non-domestic rates collection rates have been around 94 per cent for some years. That is lower than the Scottish average by upwards of 2 per cent, which in cash terms is a substantial loss to the city. As a major business centre for a far wider and more populous conurbation, Glasgow faces understandable challenges in achieving higher business rates collection levels due to a number of factors. Does the cabinet secretary agree that an incentivisation scheme that permits local retention of extra revenues would be best piloted in Glasgow? I urge him to consider that suggestion. Which model would he consider most appropriate for Glasgow? I reiterate that I would like Glasgow to be included in any pilot business rates incentivisation scheme.

John Swinney: I will certainly consider Mr Doris's suggestion about the possibility of undertaking a pilot scheme in Glasgow. I am keen to take forward a business rates incentivisation scheme to continue the work that the Government has supported over the past three years to motivate and encourage local authorities to see themselves as performing a significant role in encouraging economic development at local level. We all have a vested interest in ensuring that we have a prosperous economy in all localities of Scotland, and I think that a business rates incentivisation scheme would assist that.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary confirmed to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee yesterday that he will meet Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce to explain his policy decisions on business rates. Does he accept the chamber's calculation that this year's rates increase, net of any reliefs, will cost businesses in Aberdeen city and shire more than £30 million a year?

John Swinney: Mr Macdonald's point had the interesting caveat that it was before reliefs. As I said in my answer to Sarah Boyack earlier, the rates revaluation process provides a benefit of the order of £200 million, which the Scottish Government has used to fix the business poundage rate at the same rate as that in

England. Without that, business rates bills would have been significantly higher in Scotland. Mr Macdonald needs to reflect on that in assessing the information that he has set out to the Parliament today.

Of course I look forward to my meeting with Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

Voluntary Sector (Support)

10. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to support the voluntary sector. (S3O-10496)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): Over the past three years, we have sought to empower the third sector to join in the delivery of the national purpose, which will benefit everyone in Scotland. We have provided more than £90 million to grow the sector, to support the development of voluntary organisations and social enterprises and to promote volunteering. We have brought senior figures in the sector into discussions with the Scottish Cabinet and we have brokered a powerful agreement between the sector and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers. The sector has risen to that challenge and, in the years to come, we expect that it will be a powerful force to support those who are most in need in difficult economic circumstances.

Margaret Mitchell: Given that the voluntary and third sector is often viewed by local authorities as an easy route for making cuts during periods of tightening public expenditure, and in view of the fact that at stage 3 consideration of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Bill the Scottish National Party and Labour voted against amendment 77, which would have required public authorities to take into account the joint statement between COSLA, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Government to promote the third sector, what will the minister do to ensure that family support services, citizens advice bureaux, women's aid and other vital local services that are delivered by the third sector are not squeezed?

Jim Mather: The member comes to the chamber with a false premise. We have increased funding for the voluntary sector. I chaired a meeting on 13 April at which we brought the voluntary sector together to engender yet more cohesion. If the member still has the deep concerns that she has just voiced, I would be keen to see them in writing and to engage with her more fully on the matter.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): At the Finance Committee, it was noted by local

authority witnesses that, although there has been willingness on the part of local authorities and the voluntary sector to work in partnership, there are issues of differing governance and regulation systems to overcome. Are the cabinet secretary and ministers taking any action to assist smoother working operations, to allow the voluntary sector to maximise its extremely valuable role in the provision of public services?

Jim Mather: Indeed, we are. We very much encourage third sector organisations to apply professional management methods, both for their own protection and for better delivery of the outcomes that they seek. The most tangible point is that the Big Lottery Fund is funding the development of a bespoke version of the European framework for quality management, which will give the third sector and its interface organisations the opportunity to adopt management practices on a par with the best. As I said earlier, we very much encourage that continuing coming together and the triggering of further discussions involving the third sector to deliver the outcomes that are required under single outcome agreements.

Economic Development (Highlands and Islands)

11. Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how much Highlands and Islands Enterprise invested in economic development in 2009-10. (S3O-10520)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Highlands and Islands Enterprise received grant in aid of £58.7 million during 2009-10 for economic development activities. It received additional income from the European Union and revenue from capital assets of about £12 million. A final figure for total expenditure on economic development will not be available until the accounts for 2009-10 have been completed.

Dave Thompson: I am pleased that we have a healthy budget for Highlands and Islands Enterprise. There is one project that HIE has funded that has not reached its full potential: the Cairngorm mountain railway. It is held back by a rule that bars people from leaving the Ptarmigan top station to go on to the mountain. Will the cabinet secretary instruct HIE to do all that it can to get that restriction lifted, so that the railway can reach its full potential?

John Swinney: As an aside, the last time I travelled up the Cairngorm mountain railway, what prevented me leaving the top station was not a rule from government authority but about 15ft of snow—a rather physical obstacle.

I listened carefully to Mr Thompson's point, and I will raise it with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. We will do all that we can to address the issue.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In March this year, 53 Highlands and Islands Enterprise employees were made redundant, with an average severance package of £63,600. According to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the employees could be

"removed without impacting significantly on HIE's ability to fulfil its remit."

Given that HIE's budget has been decreased by the Government since 2007, can the finance secretary indicate whether further redundancies with large severance packages will take place and, if so, whether HIE will be able to maintain its current remit and responsibilities?

John Swinney: As Mary Scanlon will know, with the focus that we have given to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, we have provided very active support to the development of growth opportunities in the Highlands and Islands economy, in addition to maintaining the important and unique role of Highlands and Islands Enterprise in relation to the social and economic development of the most vulnerable and economically challenged areas in rural Scotland. That is the purpose of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the obligation on ministers and the organisation's board is to ensure that the resources that are available to it are most effectively deployed to achieve that vision. That is the approach that we have taken with Highlands and Islands Enterprise—I would have thought that that vision and approach would be respected on the Conservative benches—and we will continue to do that in the years to come.

On the redundancies, we are talking about packages for voluntary redundancy, which is a way of reducing the on-going costs of an organisation to ensure its sustainability. The Government will consider whether any such proposals are required at any stage in future at the initiation of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise board.

Scotch Whisky Industry (Meetings)

12. Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive when a minister last had a meeting with representatives of the Scotch whisky industry and what issues were discussed. (S3O-10485)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Ministers regularly meet representatives of the Scotch whisky industry to discuss a range of issues.

Gavin Brown: I thank the cabinet secretary for that ultra helpful answer.

The cabinet secretary will know that the industry is deeply worried about minimum pricing and that the Scotch Whisky Association believes that the policy could cost £600 million a year in exports. I know that John Swinney wants to be a local champion—and a national champion. Given the importance of the industry to Scotland's economy, would it be reasonable to ask Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Development International or one of the cabinet secretary's directorates to review and respond to the Scotch Whisky Association analysis?

John Swinney: There has been an extensive dialogue with the Scotch Whisky Association on the question of minimum pricing.

Gavin Brown: No, there has not.

John Swinney: I am not sure why Mr Brown is shaking his head. I have had conversations with the Scotch Whisky Association about minimum pricing, so I know full well that there have been discussions with it about the question.

I make this point to Mr Brown with the greatest of respect: I cannot see that minimum pricing would have the slightest impact on the Scotch whisky industry. It is a premium product industry; it is not the target of minimum pricing. The industry has everything to champion—to use Mr Brown's word—in terms of its quality, and numerous players in the whisky industry have made it clear that they think that minimum pricing is the way to take forward the agenda.

Ministers remain happy to discuss the issues around minimum pricing with the Scotch Whisky Association. That has been our position throughout the process, and the issues that have been raised by the association will, I am sure, be fully considered in the scrutiny of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill as it goes through the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 13 has been withdrawn.

Bus Services

14. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to support bus services across Scotland. (S3O-10453)

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

The Scottish Government reached an agreement earlier this year with the Confederation of Passenger Transport on funding levels for concessionary travel and the bus service operators grant, which will give budget certainty and stability to the bus industry. This funding amounts to more than £240 million in the current financial year.

Rhona Brankin: The minister will be aware that Lothian Buses is the biggest publicly owned bus operator in the United Kingdom. As the company does not have a private shareholder that is seeking to maximise profits, the travelling public in Edinburgh and the Lothians benefit from low fares and one of the most modern bus fleets in the UK. Does he therefore share my concern that City of Edinburgh Council, the largest shareholder in Lothian Buses, has removed from the board a number of directors who are committed to the firm remaining independent and in public ownership? Does he agree that it would be hugely detrimental to staff and passengers if Lothian Buses were sold off to a private operator?

Stewart Stevenson: The member will be aware that this minister is a regular user of Lothian Buses services—the number 22 is rarely without my presence.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): Do you spend all day on the buses?

Stewart Stevenson: I think that some Liberal members think that I am being too liberal with my time on the buses but, believe me, it is highly enjoyable.

On a serious point, it is clear that Lothian Buses is a successful company. Among other companies, it is benefiting from the certainty that we provided not only in the current financial year but for three years to come and from our stepping up of the bus service operators grant by 10 per cent to protect services and ensure that the public get the services that they require.

We shall watch with interest the development of Lothian Buses. I am sure that its future will be as successful as its recent past.

Credit Unions

15. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is aware of the recommendation by the Financial Services Authority in its recent consultation paper to increase the minimum initial capital threshold from £1,000 to £10,000 for version 1 credit unions and from £5,000 to £50,000 for version 2 credit unions. (S3O-10527)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I confirm that we are aware of the Financial Services

Authority's recommendation in its consultation paper to raise prudential standards.

Robert Brown: The minister will also be aware of the legislative reform order on credit unions that was promoted through the United Kingdom Parliament just before the election. Does the minister share my concern that the raising of the capital threshold seems to indicate a preference for regional rather than local credit unions? What is the minister's view of that? Is he worried that the new limits might inhibit the establishment of credit unions, particularly at this difficult time? Has he discussed the issue with his UK counterparts? Does he have any concerns about the reliance on external financing that appears to be part of the assumptions in the consultation paper?

John Swinney: I sympathise with the points that Robert Brown raises. It might be the case that some of the arrangements that are undertaken as part of an exercise to ensure robust financial management arrangements in credit unions will affect the character and nature of some credit unions. Part of the strength of credit unions, as I have seen in many visits to credit unions throughout the country, lies in their location and their proximity to their communities, which engenders confidence on the part of members of the public.

I have not made representations to the UK Government on that issue, but I am sure that, given the new contacts that Mr Brown has, he and I can work to put that point across. It is important that there are no unintended consequences of an attempt to try to guarantee financial security and strength in credit unions. None of us wants the fundamental characteristics of credit unions to be undermined.

“The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6295, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the national health service quality strategy.

14:58

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome the opportunity to lead this debate.

In recent years, the NHS has made impressive progress in improving the quality of health care. Undoubtedly, the most impressive achievement has been the slashing of waiting times. Like many MSPs, when I was first elected, it was not uncommon to get letters from people who had waited a year or more for treatment. Thankfully, that is a thing of the past. Waiting times for both out-patient and in-patient treatment are now at record lows and we are on track to meet the 18-weeks referral-to-treatment target next year. Both this Administration and the previous one can justifiably take some credit for that achievement, but the real praise should go to the NHS staff who have delivered it. However, important though that progress on waiting times is, we should not rest on our laurels. We must be—and this Government is—committed to making further improvements.

Patients want speedy treatment and quick access to care, but they want more than that. They also want a health service that is compassionate and treats them with dignity; they want to see real partnership between clinicians, patients and others; they want services to be provided in a clean and safe environment; they want hospital food to be good; they want continuity right through their journey of care; and, of course, they want to have confidence in the quality and effectiveness of any treatment.

Achieving all that for every patient, every time that they use the NHS, is what the quality strategy is all about. At its heart is a simple but very ambitious aim: to make the NHS in Scotland a world leader in the quality of health care services that it delivers.

That aim is not just good for patients, it is also right for staff. There is real enthusiasm across the NHS for the quality strategy—something that I would be the first to accept cannot always be said about Government initiatives. The reason for that enthusiasm is fourfold.

First, delivering compassionate care is at the very heart of clinical values. For staff in the NHS,

being able to contribute to the delivery of high quality health care services with their colleagues and with patients motivates them every day.

Secondly, the quality strategy is not just another Government initiative. Although we are calling it a strategy, it is, in reality, much more than that. It is a whole new ethos and one that I believe will position us more effectively to build on the strong foundations that we already have in place and on the impressive progress made to date and which will enable us to meet the challenges that we all know lie ahead.

Thirdly, it is about not reinventing the wheel but building on what already works and spreading good practice to every ward, surgery and clinic. For example, I have been hugely impressed by the results of the Scottish patient safety programme in reducing adverse incidents for patients and by the results of the releasing time to care initiative, which examines the systems and processes in place in a ward to cut down the time that nurses are forced to waste and free them up to do what they do best—care directly for patients

Fourthly, it has been developed through extensive discussion with people working in and with the NHS, representatives from patient groups, the third sector and colleagues across the wider public sector.

So, what does the quality strategy do? Principally, it sets out three quality ambitions. First, we will create beneficial partnerships between patients, their families and those delivering health care services. Those partnerships will respect individual needs and values and will demonstrate compassion, continuity, clear communication and shared decision making. Secondly, we will ensure that people experience no avoidable injury or harm from the health care that they receive and that they are cared for in an appropriate, clean and safe environment at all times. Thirdly, the most appropriate treatments, interventions, support and services will be provided at the right time to everyone who will benefit from them, with no wasteful or harmful variation.

When I talk about the quality strategy, I am well aware that there are always sceptics—healthy sceptics, I have to say—thinking, “Surely all of that is what the NHS should do anyway.” The answer to that question is, “Yes, it should,” and, in many, many cases, “Yes, it does.” However, the truth—that we must face up to—is that it does not do so consistently for all the patients who use the NHS all the time.

Our ambition—the ambition of the quality strategy—is that, in future, it will. So, from now on, everything that we do in the NHS will seek to contribute to those ambitions, and the delivery and performance management arrangements,

including the health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment, or HEAT, system that members—certainly members of the Health and Sport Committee—are well aware of, will be aligned to support that.

The other question that will be asked is, “How will we know that the quality strategy is succeeding?” The answer is that we will systematically measure progress. Quality—with its inevitable element of subjectivity—is, of course, harder to measure than, for example, waiting times, but it can and will be done.

We are developing a quality measurement framework that supports our vision of health care quality as described by the three quality ambitions. Progress towards those ambitions will be assessed by reference to quality outcome measures. Those will be based on a combination of patient and staff-reported experiences and outcomes as well as measures of patient safety and clinical effectiveness. The detail of the measures is still being developed, but pages 37 and 38 of the strategy give some examples of measures that are being considered.

The quality outcome measures will also contribute to a quality scorecard, which is a key tool for NHS boards to use to assess quality of care and to provide early warning of any potential quality issues. In light of the situation that arose in Mid Staffordshire in England and, indeed, in the Vale of Leven here, I believe that that is an important tool for boards to use, in addition to the governance systems that they already have in place.

As I have said, the HEAT targets will in future be aligned to the quality ambitions.

At the very heart of the quality strategy and the measurement framework is the determination to listen to patients’ views. Ultimately the success of the quality strategy will be determined by the perceptions and experiences of those who use the NHS and of their loved ones and by the views of those who work in the NHS. That is why it is so important to gather those views both in a way in which they have never been gathered before and to more of an extent than ever before and to ensure that they are used to drive further improvement.

In my remaining time, I will make a number of points about NHS resources, as raised in two of the amendments. First, I have heard some suggest—not necessarily anyone in the chamber—that with the tightening of public sector budgets now is the wrong time to embark on something as undoubtedly ambitious as the quality strategy. I could not disagree more strongly. When a patient gets care or treatment on the NHS that is not of the highest quality, it is not only a disservice

to the patient but an inefficient use of NHS resources. For example, a patient who goes into hospital for a straightforward procedure that should see them discharged the next day might pick up an infection that leads to their staying in for a week. That is both hugely traumatic for the patient and an avoidable cost burden on the NHS. Quality care equals efficient and cost-effective care, and that is hugely important in this financial climate.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I have a question not about the global amount of funding, but about its distribution. The cabinet secretary will recall that we met to discuss the difficulties that rural health boards are facing as a result of the move to the national resource allocation committee distribution formula. When will she be able to come back to Parliament with the results of the look-again at the rural element of health funding distribution, given its impact on the services that are necessary in such areas?

Nicola Sturgeon: Jeremy Purvis has certainly raised that issue with me before. In fact, Malcolm Chisholm raised NRAC issues in Parliament earlier this morning and Christine Grahame, too, has highlighted the same issues. As Mr Purvis knows, the technical advisory group on resource allocation is looking at certain issues around the NRAC formula, and I am more than happy to consider where it would be appropriate to update Parliament on the outcome of that work. In the meantime, however, I am also more than happy to keep Mr Purvis updated. Whatever funding allocation formula is in place should be fair and should keep pace with some of the changes that happen in the NHS.

On the Labour amendment, I point out that this year's NHS budget is £264 million higher than last year's as a result of our action to protect the NHS from the impact of a Westminster-imposed £500 million cut in our budget. We will continue to protect the NHS. However, it is also right that the service makes efficiency savings to maximise the resources that it can spend on front-line care. Those savings are robustly scrutinised to ensure that they do not damage the quality of front-line care—indeed, that will continue to be the case—but it is vital that we do everything possible to ensure that every pound is spent wisely for the benefit of patients, to meet the population's changing needs and expectations and to reflect the different ways in which health care is delivered.

I am going to be charitable about the Liberal Democrat amendment, which I assume was lodged before the Lib Dems went into coalition with a Tory party intent on cutting £6 billion from public spending this year. I suggest that if the Lib

Dems have concerns about the impact of Tory spending plans on Scottish budgets—as they should—they should address them in the first instance to the new Lib Dem Chief Secretary to the Treasury, whose job it will be to implement the cuts. On the Tory amendment, I am happy to report back to Parliament in the way that has been suggested.

To all the Opposition parties I say that, although it is absolutely appropriate for all of us to make our various points in the debate, I hope that when it comes to tonight's vote we can unite behind the quality strategy and show those tasked with delivering it that we are all behind them in their efforts. I also hope that we can unite to ensure that over the next few challenging years we protect to the best of our ability the health service that is so highly cherished in our country.

I believe that the quality strategy's implementation will strengthen confidence in our NHS and will give confidence not only to patients and carers but to staff in the job that they are doing. I believe that it will help us to build an even greater sense of national pride in an NHS that I believe is amongst the best in the world.

I am happy to move,

That the Parliament commends *The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland* as the right approach, at the right time, to delivering the highest quality healthcare to everybody in Scotland, responding to what they want, need and deserve and, through this, to ensuring that the quality of healthcare services across NHS Scotland becomes recognised as among the best in the world.

15:10

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the NHS quality strategy and I congratulate the Scottish Government on introducing it. I find little to disagree with in the document and I am sure that that view will be shared among members across the chamber. We all want safe, clinically effective and person-centred treatment, which is at the heart of the quality strategy. We all want Scotland to become a world leader in the delivery of health care. It is right that we should continually strive to improve our delivery of services and the outcomes that we achieve for people throughout the country.

The ambition is right, and I am sure that the cabinet secretary will acknowledge that achieving that ambition will be dependent on leadership at all levels of the NHS, shared ownership of the objectives and, of course, partnership with staff, patients and carers. All that will be critical if we are to achieve change on the scale that is required and to begin to meet the objectives and take the direction of travel that the strategy sets out.

If any of the sentiments in the document is to become real, measuring progress matters. I am therefore interested in the quality framework, underpinned by HEAT targets, that will serve to monitor and drive progress. I have no disagreement with the 12 overarching outcome measures that are proposed and I am pleased that there is an outcome on hospital-acquired infections. However, there is a suggestion that there will be a reduction in HEAT targets. I ask the cabinet secretary which ones will be dropped and whether new ones will be developed.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is an important issue and one on which I am happy to keep the Parliament updated. It is not a question of dropping HEAT targets; the aim is to ensure that the HEAT targets that we choose are aligned with the ambitions in the quality strategy to ensure that boards and those who work in the NHS are clear about the objectives that they are working towards. As always, I will ensure that Parliament is kept updated as that work develops.

Jackie Baillie: I am sure that we all look forward to scrutinising that work as it is produced.

As the cabinet secretary did, I pay tribute to all staff in the NHS. Their contribution is simply beyond measure. So whether somebody is a consultant, a doctor, a nurse, a member of catering staff or a porter, we appreciate their commitment and service to the NHS and we thank them for it.

I am worried about the cuts that are being implemented now in various parts of the NHS. The cabinet secretary will say that the amount of money that the Scottish National Party Government has provided to the NHS has gone up by £264 million, but she will not tell us that that is the lowest settlement in real terms made to the NHS in Scotland since the days of Michael Scissorhands Forsyth—it is a mere 0.1 per cent increase in real terms. That is why, when representatives of health boards appeared before the Health and Sport Committee yesterday, their evidence revealed £270 million of cuts in the present financial year. For example, NHS Lanarkshire acknowledges its increase of £16.7 million for this year, but its increased costs are £40 million. The board says that it needs to make £17 million of savings. What about NHS Lothian? It has had a £31 million uplift, but it has increased costs of £60 million, with savings of £29 million to be found. NHS Tayside has had a £12 million uplift, but it has increased costs of £42 million and savings of £30 million have to be found.

I ask the cabinet secretary please not to tell me that those are efficiency savings. The so-called efficiency savings that health boards are having to find have to be achieved because, frankly, she has assumed them in their budget allocation and they

are now affecting front-line services. They are cuts, so let us call them that. The cabinet secretary is quick to call for consensus and honesty. Have you noticed, Presiding Officer, that she usually does so when she is in trouble? Now is her chance to be honest with the Parliament. Can she explain how cuts of the kind that I am about to describe, which are just a flavour, have no impact on front-line services and will contribute to achieving the NHS quality strategy?

In my area, the replacement for the Alexandria medical centre, which was promised by the cabinet secretary and which is in the vision for the Vale of Leven, is on hold and under review. The community maternity unit has now moved from a 24/7 service to a daytime service, with women having to locate an on-call midwife before the doors are unlocked and the light is switched on in the unit. But guess what? The majority of babies are born at night. Is that efficient, or even sensible? I do not think so.

What about the 500 cleaning hours that are to be cut from Glasgow royal infirmary? Have we learned nothing about hospital-acquired infections?

What about NHS Lothian, which has been forced to reduce its workforce by 700? How many are front-line staff?

NHS Lanarkshire does not seem to understand the importance that the cabinet secretary ascribes to prevention. Smoking cessation staff numbers are being cut in half. The Braveheart programme is being reduced, if not cancelled. We heard earlier today from Cathie Craigie about the removal of podiatry services from an 80-year-old constituent. Sticking with NHS Lanarkshire, what about the cancellation of the 130-bed acute mental health unit and the likely reduction in community psychiatric services?

I know that the cabinet secretary will tell us that she has kept open Monklands accident and emergency unit, but she has not invested one single penny in the fabric of the rest of the hospital building, which is falling down. On her watch, she has allowed 16 surgical beds to be mothballed and there is no new mental health facility and no new cancer centre, which was promised.

How will we achieve the NHS quality strategy if those front-line services are being cut? In NHS Ayrshire and Arran, the new kidney unit is being cancelled. In NHS Borders, there is a review of £180,000 of spending on medical staff. In NHS Tayside, there have been £3 million savings from not filling vacancies. Our already hard-pressed front-line staff are being asked to do even more as their colleagues face a future on the dole queue.

NHS Dumfries and Galloway has taken almost £3 million off its acute services. NHS Forth Valley

has taken off £2.5 million. No part of the country is immune to the SNP cuts. Make no mistake—those cuts are made in Scotland. The SNP is guilty of fantasy economics. The Scottish budget rose by £917 million in 2010-11. That is a fact. The SNP got £917 million more this year than last year. Those figures—which I know that the SNP would not trust me with—are confirmed by the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No. Indeed I will not.

It is not often that I agree with Annabel Goldie, but she is right that the style of the SNP Government is based on grudge and grievance. However, the Government cannot blame somebody else, as it will inevitably try to do; it must take the responsibility. If it does not, it will be engaging in the politics of the school playground. The promise that the SNP made to the Scottish people was that it would protect front-line services. The litany of cuts that I have outlined today expose that as being a hollow promise indeed.

The First Minister talked about the Tory cuts to come. We have not even got there yet. I am sure that we will watch the budget, which is due in 50 days, with considerable interest, but the cuts that I am describing are SNP cuts—the SNP's alone. The SNP cannot say that it is putting £264 million extra into the budget to protect front-line services when we discover today that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is cutting 1,252 jobs in its area this year alone. It is clear—to me, at least—that if 1,252 members of staff are removed, there will be a direct impact on patient care and quality.

Let us look at who those 1,252 members of staff are. They include: 21 doctors in training at the Queen Mother's hospital; 669 nursing and midwifery staff; reductions in elderly mental health services at Parkhead hospital; reductions in occupational health services; a redesign of Clyde mental health services with 45 fewer nursing staff; 60 fewer allied health professionals in podiatry, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy; and—get this—41 fewer pharmacists, who are being replaced by three automated dispensing machines. Did the cabinet secretary know? Did she agree to any of that?

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has commented that towards the end of 2009, the Scottish Government health department announced a review of NHS workforce planning processes and advised that it would not require workforce projections by the end of April, as with previous years. However, on 9 April 2010, the Scottish Government health department wrote again to the human resources directors to request a workforce narrative for 2010-11 from all health

boards by 30 April 2010. Was the cabinet secretary aware that health boards were told in late 2009 that no more workforce projections were required? Was she aware that the health department then changed its mind on 9 April, when it wrote to boards?

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: Is she aware of the projections for all health boards, given that they were submitted by 30 April?

Is Glasgow just the tip of the iceberg? In the interests of transparency, will the cabinet secretary release the projections today to SPICe, or does she have something to hide? I fear that the cabinet secretary is not just letting the cuts happen but demanding them.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: I am conscious of time.

I fear that the NHS quality strategy will be strangled at birth. Quality is about people—staff and patients—working together to improve our service. The strategy is essential and I share the cabinet secretary's view about its importance. I will take an intervention from her if she will tell me how the cuts will have no impact on quality.

Nicola Sturgeon: I will answer Jackie Baillie's questions. If she knew anything about the process, she would know that every board's local delivery plan is published once it is finalised.

I return to the point about the health department writing to boards. Does not Jackie Baillie think that it is a good idea for the health department to ask for boards' plans, so that we can scrutinise them? That is exactly what we are doing with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's plans. If she were standing where I am standing, would she not do that? Would she allow things to happen without her scrutiny?

Jackie Baillie: Absolutely not. However, my question was about whether the cabinet secretary was aware of what has happened. If she is, she stands accused of not protecting the health service from cuts and of demanding that such cuts happen throughout the health service. In the interests of transparency, I invite her to place the information with SPICe.

The First Minister and his deputy, the cabinet secretary, stand accused of the worst kind of hypocrisy. They say one thing but do something entirely different. They show no compassion, no sympathy and not one iota of concern for the staff who will lose their jobs and their hard-working families. What about patients? Will the cabinet

secretary give a cast-iron guarantee that patient safety will not be compromised in any way?

SNP members promised to protect front-line services. On the evidence so far, they have failed. What is even worse is that they do not even appear to have tried.

I move amendment S3M-6295.3, to insert at end:

“; therefore notes with concern submissions by NHS boards to the Health and Sport Committee identifying cuts to frontline services, and believes that these risk undermining the NHS Quality Strategy.”

15:21

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): “The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland” is interesting in that it sets out priorities, foundations and strategies. As Jackie Baillie said, no one doubts the need to focus on the quality of health care and—particularly in the current circumstances—on the best value for the public pound.

I say before making positive and constructive points that I will probably come under the category of healthy sceptic. I must ask why it is necessary to state the three aims of

“putting people at the heart of our NHS ... providing the best possible care and advice compassionately and reliably”

and

“making measurable improvement in the ... quality of care”.

As the cabinet secretary said, surely that is already happening. Do NHS staff really need to be told that? As for person-centred, safe and effective health care, is it really necessary to publish a document to state such key drivers and ambitions to staff who provide a first-class and excellent service day by day, as the cabinet secretary has said?

Quality ambitions that the strategy has required to outline are that

“There will be no avoidable injury or harm to people from healthcare they receive ... an appropriate, clean and safe environment”

and

“The most appropriate treatments, interventions, support and services ... provided at the right time to”

all who will benefit. In all the time that I have taken an interest in the health service, particularly since 1999, I assumed that that was happening.

It is incredible that any Government in any country should have to outline the fundamental ethos of health care, as the Scottish Government does in its new strategy for the NHS. For many people who have years of service in our NHS,

being told to be caring and compassionate, to avoid harm to patients and to provide patient-centred, safe and effective care is surely hurtful—to say the least. They have done that all their lives and that is why they gave their commitment and vocation to the NHS.

The strategy lacks emphasis on joint working with partners, which could be the basis of a quality strategy in its own right. The recent Health and Sport Committee inquiry into out-of-hours NHS care in rural areas showed the lack of joint working and of communication between NHS 24, accident and emergency departments, general practitioners and the Scottish Ambulance Service. I say to the cabinet secretary that the patient experience can be enhanced only by the whole health service working seamlessly.

Also absent from the document is mention of the fact that although the NHS is our caring profession, the way in which it treats its staff is not always too caring. Grievance and disciplinary procedures, along with staff suspensions and gardening leave, can last for months or years. That has a devastating impact on individuals and their families, represents a loss of skills to the health service and costs money in salaries, while not allowing NHS professionals to practise or patients to benefit.

That takes me to the issue of whistleblowing. From many constituency cases in the Highlands, I know that there is no doubt that the NHS does not provide a positive and constructive environment for staff to suggest improvements. The British Medical Association report “Standing up For Doctors; Speaking Out For Patients”, published today, found that only 5 per cent of doctors are aware of a whistleblowing policy, with junior doctors being significantly less likely to report concerns, stating that they were not confident that they would be listened to and were concerned that they might alienate themselves from their colleagues or that their career prospects could be harmed. Doctors’ concerns relate to patient care—the behaviour of fellow staff members and NHS boards’ targets and strategies—yet doctors do not work in an environment that allows issues of patient safety to be raised. Unless that changes, the patient cannot be at the heart of our health service. I am interested to know how the quality scorecard will address such issues.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am not sure whether these days I am supposed to intervene during the speech of a Conservative spokesman. Mary Scanlon questioned the need for the strategy. I will not argue the cabinet secretary’s case for her, but do not the problems that the member has outlined reinforce the view that the strategy is needed?

Mary Scanlon: I have always had a good working relationship with my Lib Dem colleagues in the Highlands. I am highlighting what is absent from the strategy, which is important.

There could be more focus on partnership, based on NHS Scotland working with independent contractors. There is no doubt that one of the most improved and effective care partnerships is in optometry and pharmacy. As a result of previous Scottish Executive funding, people across Scotland can have their cataracts and other eye issues monitored in their local area. I trust that the SNP will continue its support for engaging health professionals across Scotland for patients' benefit. For example, more referrals to chiropractors would help to get people mobile, independent and back to work much sooner than if they have to wait for the target time to see a consultant. Despite the SNP manifesto pledge to increase access to alternative therapies to improve patients' quality of life, that does not appear to be happening.

My final points relate to yesterday's meeting of the Health and Sport Committee, to which Jackie Baillie referred. When NHS Lanarkshire can cut £1 million from its public health budget, due to duplication, and give the committee a cast-iron assurance that that will not impact on the current or future health of its population, there is no doubt that a more efficient use of resources is necessary and possible. Indeed, Christine Grahame asked why the board has not been making such cuts for years, if it is so easy. We cannot support the Labour Party amendment, given that all members of the Health and Sport Committee, from all parties, robustly questioned witnesses from health boards about their budgets and were consistently told that they were reducing duplication, improving patient pathways, sharing premises and support services and collaborating on procurement and many other issues.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Is Mary Scanlon asking members to believe that the cutting of 1,250 jobs in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, including doctors' and nurses' jobs, will have no effect on front-line services?

Mary Scanlon: I do not have information on jobs in Glasgow. I did not mention Glasgow; I was talking about my line of questioning of the witness from NHS Lanarkshire at yesterday's meeting of the Health and Sport Committee, in relation to which I have access to the facts. I do not know what is happening in Glasgow. I am sure that Dr Simpson understands that I cannot comment on the matter.

My party supports the policy of making 2 per cent efficiency savings, so we cannot support the amendment in my Liberal Democrat colleague's name, which is unfortunate.

I thank the cabinet secretary for her commitment to report back to the Parliament on the protection of front-line services.

I move amendment S3M-6295.1, to insert at end:

"and calls on the Scottish Government to report back to the Parliament by the end of summer recess on how it intends to respond to the needs highlighted in the report, *The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland*, in order to protect NHS frontline services."

15:30

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): The subject matter of this debate, "The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland", is interesting. Like other members who have spoken, including the cabinet secretary, I do not think that anyone will object to the Government's main objectives. Mary Scanlon was concerned about whether it was necessary to repeat the three headline ambitions, but I tend to think that when we draw up strategies the inclusion of headline objectives might help to move the strategy in the right direction.

Liberal Democrat concern is that the report is part of a structure rather than simply to be taken on its own. It is inextricably linked with the Patient Rights (Scotland) Bill. The strategy document illustrates the difficulties that I have with the bill—not that the bill is the subject of this debate. It is clear to me that there is an absolute need for a clear view of the path that we are trying to take in relation to the quality of care that the patient should expect and have a right to receive. However, bits of the document are written very much in managementspeak. For example, on page 21 we find the following interesting concept:

"Patients' motivation to be involved in mutually beneficial partnerships with their families and carers and those delivering healthcare services".

It is unclear to me quite how someone can take my motivation and mix it with anyone else's—answers on a postcard, please.

I am sorry about the managementspeak, because its presence in what ought to be an important document is unhelpful. The cabinet secretary was right to direct us to pages 37 and 38, but that does not say much for the preceding pages. Only on pages 37 and 38 do we get to the nub of the matter, which is what we are trying to deliver, for whom and with what objective.

Breakthrough Breast Cancer's approach, which was published some time ago and is described in a briefing for today's debate, is instructive. In posing and answering questions about how the approach will work, Breakthrough Breast Cancer talks about each person having a set of rights and objectives, which will be delivered to them

individually. That is a much more attractive prescription than a broad, general approach that is underpinned by legislation.

We must ask what “underpinned by legislation” means in the context of the Patient Rights (Scotland) Bill, because as I read the bill, there is not a scintilla of enforceability in it. As a piece of proposed legislation, the bill is almost a contradiction in terms. The ordinary person in the street sees legislation as conferring on them a right of redress, but if there is no such redress, we are better off having just a strategy.

Let us return to the document before us, its aims, objectives and where we are trying to get to. The Liberal Democrats agree that that higher level of ambition, standard and rightful expectation for the citizen is perfectly correct, but we do not agree with the manner in which the Government seeks to introduce its aims. The cabinet secretary should look carefully at the sort of model that is used by Breakthrough Breast Cancer, although I understand that it is on a much smaller scale and not of the same order as the NHS quality strategy. That approach would also meet the criticism levelled by the BMA, which is deeply concerned that we drift in and out of managementspeak and are not clear that our aims and objectives are being determined by quality-based evidence. The BMA’s points in that regard are extremely important.

I turn to the cabinet secretary’s charitable introduction to our amendment. I assure Mary Scanlon that our concern is not to look at all forms of inefficiencies and ways in which the health service could operate better, more effectively and efficiently. Many of the questions that the member directed to NHS Lanarkshire yesterday concerned perfect examples of the very things that we all believe ought to take place, but which are wrapped up in general efficiency savings. Our concern now is the evidence that is emerging that there could be a blanket prescription for issues that might affect front-line services. I was genuinely taken aback when, as Mary Scanlon will recall, committee members asked one of the witnesses whether efficiencies were affecting front-line services and the reply was, “That depends on how you define a front-line service.” That did not convey to me a sense of confidence that front-line services were not being affected. If all we say is, “We are not to affect front-line services, so we will redefine them. Gosh, they are affected again, so we will redefine them,” that does not fill me with confidence. We have to look carefully at what is being said and the sort of efficiency that will improve the quality and financial management of the national health service.

As a West of Scotland member, I too have received a lot of representations about potential

changes, the downgrading of nursing positions, changing nursing posts and moving specialist nursing back on to wards. If general practitioners spend 80 per cent of their time with people who have long-term conditions and whose care has been hugely improved by the availability of specialist nurses, I am bound to say that the removal of such nurses, by definition, will affect their care. It might be that it can all be explained easily by somebody somewhere, but if the Government is going to make those changes, it has to give that explanation simultaneously and it is not doing so. In my humble opinion, all that the Government is doing is creating a great deal of uncertainty among front-line professionals and patients, and that is unhelpful.

Liberal Democrats have no difficulty in agreeing with the broad thrust of the strategy and the prescription in the areas that it wishes to cover. We are profoundly uneasy that instead of concentrating on a list of standards of care that we can expect to be delivered in a similar way to the breast care strategy, the NHS quality strategy includes some nebulous reference to a bill that will have no enforceability. That means that the strategy is incomplete and requires further work.

Although we will support the Government’s strategy at decision time, we believe that it is more of a work in progress. It needs to become something that patients—particularly those who have great difficulties with the delivery of care—can rely on and believe in, and to be, in its ultimate form, a useful document. Let us be careful that where we call for blanket budget cuts, we are clear about what affects front-line services and what does not. Given the evidence from health board chairmen and the actions of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in particular, we are all left with great concern about what is happening on the ground.

I move amendment S3M-6295.2, to insert at end:

“but further notes that NHS boards, while accepting that there is scope for further efficiency savings, are concerned that the proposed efficiencies of 2%, 4% and 6% over the next three years will impact adversely on frontline services.”

15:40

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the strategy, as one who is known to recommend to any witnesses who come before the Health and Sport Committee that they should restrict their use of the word “strategy”, to which I have an aversion. I also share Ross Finnie’s sometime nausea about managementspeak and jargon, and I appreciated very much his speech, which was as thoughtful as usual.

With the greatest respect to Jackie Baillie, if she did not hector so much, I would not stop listening to her speeches. The way in which a speech is made is important and if it is made in the right way, people will listen to points, even if they do not always agree; sometimes they will find bits that they agree with.

I make my contribution against the background of the recent budget cuts from Westminster, and those that are coming down the track. Quite frankly, the recession has not hit us full-on yet. For any Opposition party to indict the Government for real or imagined cuts, as at this afternoon's First Minister's questions, is indefensible. With an emergency budget coming from Westminster in a few weeks, and without the funding to which the First Minister alluded in answer to Iain Gray, how can any Opposition party possibly say—in particular, how can the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives at Westminster say—that Scotland's front-line services, whatever they are, and its national health service, will be immune? It is a nonsense.

Even in the face of recent budget reductions from Westminster, the Government has put in additional funding, and the NHS boards that came to yesterday's meeting of the Health and Sport Committee acknowledged that. I will talk about their evidence later.

I make the distinction between the actual reduced budget from Westminster and efficiency savings. As we know, the latter are retained by the health boards to be reinvested in front-line services. I appreciate Ross Finnie's caveat about how we define those services, but in practical terms, we are talking about treatment, diagnosis, preventive measures, hygiene and so on. Of course, that list is not exhaustive. We must use our funding more carefully, while keeping in mind the watchword of quality of care; the committee referred to that, because it is concerned that care should not be the victim.

No one can disagree with the priorities of patients that are set out in the document: care and compassion; communication and collaboration between all who are involved in patient care, including the voluntary sector; continuity; and clinical excellence. For example, patients should not feel too inhibited to complain because they fear that they might get a diminished service by way of retribution. I am not saying that that happens, but there is a genuine perception, particularly among the vulnerable elderly, that if they speak up their tea will be brought to them cold, or something like that. I welcome the Patient Rights (Scotland) Bill, which will give people an opportunity to make complaints and more confidence about doing so.

In evidence taken by the committee yesterday, it was mentioned that the chief executives of Borders, Tayside and Orkney health boards, for example, are looking to make their money work more effectively by reducing the use of bank nurses, locums and agency staff, which is a costly practice, and transferring that money to investment in permanent staff, while saving at the same time to reinvest elsewhere. That ties in effectively with the communication and continuity priorities of patients. There is security for the patient in Kent faces at their bedside, for the staff to see the patient as an individual, and for a relationship to be built between the patient and ward staff. Undoubtedly, that improves the quality of care.

The committee was told about demographic changes. Lothian NHS Board's director of finance emphasised how the elderly population is growing in the Lothians, so the pressure on that board's resources is skewed differently from those of other areas. For example, remote and rural areas, as Jeremy Purvis said, face different challenges. It is obvious that the delivery of quality health care will be different in different areas, and it will be different from the bulk of health care delivery. That said, much is shared between health board areas, so sharing good practice is also key. Indeed, the boards seem to be doing that, for example by making more effective use of theatres and consultants' time.

I return to my own patch—that issue was raised by the new chief executive of NHS Borders at yesterday's meeting. It is interesting that he is a former nurse, as is the newly appointed chief executive of NHS Orkney, who was also at yesterday's meeting. I was comforted by the fact that they had come up from the grass roots.

Another issue is the use of technology. The Government's strategy refers to NHS Lothian using technology in the home, which is another way of using resources better. The Health and Sport Committee has pursued greater use of telehealth and e-health, which we must make a move on. When I say "we", I mean the Parliament collectively.

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Has the Health and Sport Committee expressed any concern about the cutting of the information technology budget, given that IT assists the health service in meeting the demands on it?

Christine Grahame: When we examined the budget, we found that some of the money had moved—*[Interruption.]* I do not know who is answering; I will leave the minister to deal with that, as she seems to want to.

Much good practice is shared by the boards. I return to early intervention—I cannot remember who mentioned the issue. At yesterday's meeting, a representative from NHS Borders talked about the treatment of ulcerated legs. Early intervention stops patients being confined to bed and prevents a great deal of expenditure. Mary Scanlon mentioned the example of optometrists, who can diagnose other illnesses in advance; the same can be done through a call to the pharmacy. The boards have embraced such practice.

Leadership is key, not only at Government level, but at board level. What came through from yesterday's meeting is that if we are to make real change, the chief executive and the director of finance must provide leadership at board level. During questioning, Ross Finnie made the important point that we must get the boards to help their chief executive and director of finance to see what their job is, which is to act in the interests of the public whom they represent, not just to put up defence walls. I hope that directly elected board members will assist with that.

Yesterday, Rhoda Grant made the interesting point that because belt tightening has had to happen, it has exposed wastage. The director of finance of NHS Tayside gave an example of how duplication—which had involved two depots and two sets of staff being used to deal with aids and adaptations across health and social care—had been ended. He announced that as if it was a wonderful achievement but, frankly—as I said at the time—if something is easy-peasy lemon-squeezy, you do not need to be a director of finance to come up with it. Michael Matheson said that such ideas were being talked about 20 years ago. There is wastage in the health service. The money from that could go into the front line.

An overview of progress will be provided by the quality alliance. It is most important that we have accountability. *[Interruption.]* I do not know what I have done. Shall I proceed, Presiding Officer? I have a chorus beside me.

Through the unions, we must speak to the staff. It is important that we do not make them concerned. We do not want to make the health service good only at ward or hospital level; we want to make staff pleased to be part of the health service and to let them know that, as Jackie Baillie rightly said—in an otherwise relatively negative speech—they are excellent staff who do an excellent job that is highly valued. I conclude.

15:48

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I want to talk about the quality strategy because for many years I have believed that the quality agenda needs to be described in

detail to the public and the media, but first I will make a couple of points about funding, which is clearly relevant to the subject under discussion.

Yesterday, Theresa Fyffe, who is the director of the Royal College of Nursing Scotland, said:

“Recruitment freezes, cutting support for frontline staff and replacing registered nurses with non-registered support staff are guaranteed ways to damage patient care.”

It is clear that we face a funding challenge, but that means that there is all the more reason to ensure that genuine, high-impact efficiency and productivity approaches are implemented rather than cuts to front-line staff. We must take a hard and clear view of that distinction.

Joe FitzPatrick: Is the member aware that the number of NHS staff has risen by 10,000 since the SNP came into government?

Malcolm Chisholm: I will take the member's word for that. I am not here to rubbish that point; I am here to talk about what is happening now.

As I said at question time—so I will not spend a lot of time on the point—it is far more important now than in the high-growth past that we ensure that NHS boards get the funding share to which they are entitled. It is self-evident that when there were big increases in the past, it did not matter if a board was not getting its share. When the boards are getting smaller, and presumably even smaller increases, it will matter a great deal. The gap between what Lothian gets and what it is entitled to is £69 million this year, which is £5 million more than last year. It is by far the biggest gap in Scotland. If that is not addressed, we will have particular problems in Lothian. I should point out that 700 jobs are already going.

Turning to the quality strategy, I particularly like the phrase about not

“pulling the plant up by the roots”,

because the quality plant has been growing over a period of many years. I pay tribute to the whole health care team for all the work that the staff have done over the years and to NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. For many years I have been a great admirer of that body and I have followed the way in which its work has evolved. It is regrettable that most people in Scotland know very little of what it does. A good example was at the recent reception that I hosted for the Neurological Alliance, when the new neurological standards were introduced. The lead clinician described how the work of NHS QIS had evolved and now, as he pointed out, it was going to work with clinicians on an on-going basis to improve the standards. That is typical of the work that NHS QIS is doing and we should pay tribute to it.

I also like the quote from Don Berwick on page 17 of the document. As far as I am concerned, and

I think that Dr Richard Simpson agrees with me, he is the number one health care improvement person in the world and I was privileged to meet him on one occasion. It is great that his institute for health care improvement is closely involved with our patient safety programme, which began under the previous Administration and was pioneered successfully by NHS Tayside.

I could go on about continuity, but I want to give three other examples. First, there is the whole issue of patient experience, which others have referred to. There is an important patient experience programme called better together, which is mentioned and described in the document; it was started under the previous Administration, along with related work. Using the experience of patients in a meaningful way is absolutely central to quality improvement. I believe—I am sure that the Government believes, too—that it needs to go a great deal further. I was a little concerned that only one of the 12 quality outcome measures listed on pages 37 and 38 of the document is a patient measure. To be fair, the document says that a second one will be developed in due course.

Ross Finnie gave a very good example of patients feeding into quality improvement. Breakthrough Breast Cancer has had that service pledge over the past few months. As far as I know, it is an excellent and successful initiative whereby patients are central in forming an improvement pledge for each breast cancer unit in the country.

Since we are talking of cancer, I should also mention, as I have done before, the outstanding work of the cancer care research centre at the University of Stirling, which has done an enormous amount of work on patient experience and, in my view, has been the Scottish leader in that field. It was led by Professor Nora Kearney, who has now moved to Dundee.

The second example is the quality and outcomes framework of the, often and wrongly maligned, GP contract. That has led to enormous improvements in primary care, which many patients are probably not aware of. Issues such as heart disease and stroke have been greatly helped by the new requirements on GPs that are part of that framework. I was pleased to see in the document that the Government is committed to building on the principles of the quality and outcomes framework to maximise quality in other service areas.

My last example is anticipatory care. That, too, was started by the previous Administration but the strategy document talks about introducing and sharing anticipatory care plans for the 5 per cent of the population who are most at risk of hospital admission. That seems a really important development. For many years, we have been

talking about the need to reduce emergency admissions but they are still going up, for whatever reason. Clearly, more anticipatory care that is targeted on the group most at risk of those admissions would be very helpful.

There are many positive features in the quality framework. It has to be seen in the light of the funding issues that many have described. In particular, we must emphasise the role and importance of front-line staff in delivering the quality improvements. At the end of the day, the front-line clinicians will do that and they must be at the centre of the quality agenda. We need to empower them to make the quality improvements that we all want. I hope that we can all be united in that objective.

15:55

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): We have heard various views from members, but the debate has been reasonably consensual thus far. I would not dare to expand on the comprehensive account that Ross Finnie gave of the Liberal Democrat position, but I will pick up a couple of issues. Members will have heard me bang on about them before.

Before I do that, however, I want to refer to something that Mary Scanlon said about Lanarkshire NHS Board. We are all aware—it is a cliché—that there is more than one way to skin a cat. Having dealt with Lanarkshire NHS Board for getting on for 14 years, I know that it does things in certain ways. For example, we are facing a situation as a result of reconfiguration and people in Cumbernauld are likely to be deprived of an out-of-hours service. The board claims that the change is a straightforward reconfiguration, but that appears not to be the case because, despite questioning, it has refused to answer questions about what will replace the service. I therefore hesitate to take what the board says without a degree of scepticism.

Mary Scanlon: I am grateful to Mr O'Donnell for raising that. I have to say to him that the questioning from the Health and Sport Committee was robust. The board said that there was duplication in the service and that the duplication had been streamlined. I would like to think that it gave an honest contribution in evidence to the committee. I do not think that I have any right to disbelieve it, despite my being a healthy sceptic. It assured us that there were no cuts to public health.

Hugh O'Donnell: I have been to a number of board meetings of the same organisation and I have had the same assurances. I take on board the point that Mary Scanlon makes.

As other members and, indeed, the cabinet secretary have said, we need to be clear that the quality of care extends beyond the medical treatment of the patient and into the whole patient experience. I apologise for lurching into management speak, but I am equally sure that members are grateful that I am not moving into “lemon-squeezy” language.

For the most part, people are not at their best when they engage with the health service. Understandably, the impression that they take is all too often a continuous one that colours not only their perception of the treatment but the perception that they give to other people when they recount their experiences. A perception that is not good will go beyond the individual patient and the individual case. We all know that individual cases are all different. The problem that I have is that we do not have a shared understanding. Like Ross Finnie, I am not convinced that the Patient Rights (Scotland) Bill will necessarily give us that.

I am particularly interested in people with disabilities, particularly learning disabilities, and their experience of engaging with our health services. Having been on the front line of that for a goodly number of years, I know that we need to ensure that we take account of disabilities, but I am not convinced that the strategy will necessarily achieve the outcomes that we seek. Happily, the “Does he take sugar?” approach is disappearing and we have a more person-centred and holistic approach to delivery of services. I am interested that we are to have a care measure from a patient’s perspective, but I ask the Government, in taking that forward, to ensure that information for patients is available through communication methods that are appropriate for the whole range of patients with whom NHS services deal, because that is not always the case. All patients need to feel empowered. Certainly from a social services perspective, empowerment has been key to making those parts of our society feel included in the normal approach.

On IT, which Duncan McNeil touched on in his intervention, I am sure that I am not unique in finding constantly that, when our committees take evidence from organisations such as health boards, we are told that the data are “patchy” or “not clear”. I accept that particular challenges might exist in the health service given the differing requirements of its different aspects, but monitoring needs to be consistent if it is to be useful to all the agencies that will access those data. At the same time, we must not deliver a process of unmitigated form filling and box ticking just so that we can appear to have hit the targets. The information must be useful rather than just politically expedient. Therefore, I welcome the strategy’s commitment to

“a programme of action to ensure that peoples’ equality needs are gathered”,

but I make a plea that we gather the information in a way that makes it readily understandable.

In conclusion, following my colleague Ross Finnie’s clear statement of the Liberal Democrat position in his opening speech, I hope that my speech has raised some issues of relevance. I hope that all the points that have been raised can be brought together to allow the strategy to do what it says on the tin.

16:01

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): The NHS is one of those public institutions that is held dear by the vast majority of the public. Everyone would prefer not to have to use the NHS, but we are very grateful for it when need arises, as I found recently when I had to go to the A and E department at 2 o’clock in the morning with one of my sons. The vast majority who use the NHS have a positive experience of care provision.

However, what makes the NHS perhaps unique among public bodies is the way in which people simply place their trust in it. People place their trust in the doctors to make the right clinical decisions to ensure that, as patients, they receive the best treatment and the treatment that they require. People also trust that the staff will act in their best interests in their time of need. People trust that everyone in the NHS has the shared objective of doing the very best in caring for them.

That said, there are clearly times when our NHS does not get it right. Sometimes, the quality of treatment or quality of care that the staff provide to patients is not what it should be. There are clearly times when the very complex system that is our NHS does not work collectively in the best interests of the patient. Given that all members will have received complaints from constituents who have raised concerns about the failings of the NHS—some members might even have personal experience of that—it is important that we take the right measures to try to rectify those problems.

The cabinet secretary rightly pointed out that we no longer receive complaints from constituents about waiting times for particular procedures. That is certainly my experience, but I now receive more complaints about the quality of care that people receive from the NHS. I believe that it is important to ensure that the trust that people place in the NHS is returned in the quality of care that they receive from the service. That is why I think that the quality strategy is both timely and welcome.

In few public institutions do people place such trust in the organisation itself, quite literally on a daily basis. Patients place their lives in the hands of the NHS and rely on it to get things right for

them. It is essential that the quality of our NHS is as high as possible throughout the patient journey so that patients get the necessary care and support.

No doubt the debates around greater efficiency and productivity in the NHS will continue over the weeks and months ahead. Given the growing financial pressure that all of the public sector is under, there will be further debate about whether we can get more out of the existing financial envelope for public services to make them more effective in delivering the services that are required.

I say to Jackie Baillie that it is fantasy to think that we can have cuts by the UK Government to the Scottish Government's budget but not expect that to trickle down in some way and impact on our public services. The question is about the priorities that the Government chooses for any additional spend. I repeat: it is complete fantasy to think that cuts to the Scottish Government's budget will not impact on public services in Scotland.

Jackie Baillie: The member's own cabinet secretary maintains that the health budget has grown by £264 million and that, as a result of that, front-line services are being protected. How does cutting staff—1,252 of them in Glasgow alone—equate with protecting front-line services?

Michael Matheson: It is remarkable that the cabinet secretary has managed to secure that increase in funding for the NHS here in Scotland in the face of a £500 million cut to the Scottish Government's grant, which was made by the previous Labour Government. We can clearly see where the Scottish Government's priorities lie: in protecting front-line public services such as those in the NHS.

I particularly welcome the recognition in the strategy document for staff and for the focus in the NHS on being caring and compassionate. Staff have a key role in delivering that care. We can have state-of-the-art hospitals and the best clinicians in the world—we have many of them in the NHS in Scotland—but we must ensure that the quality of NHS staff is as high as possible. That can be the tell-tale mark of the patient's experience of the NHS. Staff have a central role in delivering the strategy. It is through high-quality staff that we can deliver high-quality care for patients in the NHS.

16:08

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde (Lab): As has already been said, we can share a great deal of pride in the achievements of the NHS and its staff in Scotland. They have created a system that has produced results for people with serious conditions such as heart disease, stroke

and cancer. As a result of our work early in the life of the Parliament, when we focused on such areas, there are people in my constituency who have lived longer and whose quality of life has been improved.

We introduced targets and we drove up standards so that unacceptable waiting times for surgery and treatment would no longer be commonplace—as has been referred to by the cabinet secretary and Michael Matheson. I agree with them. However, although the complaints at our surgeries have changed, the case load has not. I completely agree that those changes in complaints have concerned the quality of service, particularly for the elderly.

There are still areas where we have not achieved what we would have liked to achieve—in vitro fertilisation treatment, for instance. People who cannot pay still wait for two years or more for IVF, and that needs to be addressed.

Reductions in waiting times are seen as an achievement, but however successful and popular they are, they have come at a price. Hospital wards and staff are geared up for the production line. I do not treat that in a negative way, as it is very efficient when it runs smoothly and it ensures that people enjoy a positive and speedy experience. However, when we push people through the system, the consequence sometimes is that we push the caring out of the system.

I had my own experience recently as a day patient requiring surgery. I was in in the morning and out in the evening, and I had a good and positive experience at Inverclyde royal hospital. If people can walk in and walk out, the experience is great. However, I also have personal and casework experience of what happens to elderly and frail people who require extra treatment. A receiving ward in an acute hospital is not a good place for those people. They have extra demands, which in my experience and from my case load I know are not being addressed. While we celebrate the achievements and recognise the progress that we have made on waiting times, we need to have a balance.

I share the cabinet secretary's enthusiasm to deliver a patient-centred approach in our health service. I believe that it is possible to take the benefits of the targets system that we introduced and marry it with an approach to care and support that all patients require. Whether that is possible in the current climate is another question. Whether we like it or not, the strategy comes against a backdrop of falling investment, services being axed and hundreds of staff facing cuts.

In today's debate, we have heard several examples of the cuts that health boards have been forced to make. More than 1,250 jobs have gone

in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and I am fearful of what that will mean in Greenock and Inverclyde. We also know, as was mentioned earlier, about recruitment issues, which are particularly important in respect of continuity of care. Nurses and midwives are leaving the country to get their first jobs while, as Christine Grahame mentioned, existing staff in the service work longer hours and overtime. Any of the health board reports will identify that massive problem.

None of that bodes well, and it undermines our shared ambition of delivering a world-leading health service. It is easy to say that we will deliver the type of health service that we all hope for, in which quality of care is premium, but it is much more difficult to put it into action.

To demonstrate that, I will cite the example of the Ardgowan hospice in my constituency, which for nearly 30 years has provided an excellent transport service for patients who require cancer treatment outwith the area. As members will appreciate, it is more than just a pick-up and drop-off service. It spares people who are in a weakened condition an awkward journey, it spares them the inconvenience of waiting around before and after what can be a very arduous treatment, and it offers some much-required comfort after what is sometimes a harrowing experience. I have spoken to volunteer drivers and heard of the bond that they develop with patients during these difficult, and now shared, experiences.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, in its 2010 "Palliative Care Health Needs Assessment", stated that patients

"found this to be a very welcome support that reduced the added stress that the ambulance transport brought to an already stressful experience."

However, when budgets were reviewed at the health board, it was decided that it could no longer fund the service. It would seem that, from an annual budget of £2.6 billion, the health board is unable to find the £35,000 that is required to support the transport service. Is that an example of quality being considered over cost? Is it a decision that is likely to inspire confidence? Is it responsive to what, in the terms of the cabinet secretary's motion, users of the health service "want, need and deserve"?

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Has Duncan McNeil received my letter on the matter yet?

Duncan McNeil: I have not. I hope that it will tell me that I have wasted my time this afternoon, and that a cheque for £35,000 is on its way to those volunteers, to allow them to carry out the job that they have done for 30 years. If the letter contains anything less than that, the minister will be getting another letter. If we are serious about putting

quality into the health service, we cannot allow decisions like that to stand. I urge the cabinet secretary and the minister to ensure that the money is made available to ensure that the voluntary drivers at Ardgowan are given the support that they need. That would be a perfect way to demonstrate the Government's commitment to preserving quality in the health service.

16:15

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow) (SNP): In the NHS in Scotland, we have a comprehensive system of medical care, the significance of which we can sometimes overlook as we continue to strive to make it better. We cannot, however, let that constant striving for improvement blind us to the success that the NHS achieves day in and day out. To that end, I would like to begin my speech by giving my thanks—not just as an MSP but as a patient—to all health workers, who work incredibly hard. I have first-hand experience, having worked for a time as a nursing auxiliary. I also come from a nursing family, with nurses, health visitors, porters, cleaners and auxiliaries among us. Indeed, my aunt is part of the League of Hospital Friends Inverclyde who—as Ross Finnie, Duncan McNeil and Stuart McMillan will be aware, because they supported the campaign—last week won their fight with the health board to be able to continue to provide the café services whose profits they donate to the hospital. I congratulate the League of Hospital Friends and congratulate everyone—paid or voluntary—who is working to improve our NHS.

The quality strategy is a powerful new framework for our patients and our health care professionals. As it is evidence-based in its goals, interventions and objectives, I do not doubt that it will be warmly welcomed by the Scottish people and those in the health sector. The strategy aims high: we are to be world leaders in health care quality. That is the right approach. We would not do ourselves any favours by attempting anything else. In 2007, the people of Scotland voted for ambitious governance, so it is right that we continue to fight to deliver ambitious and achievable goals and strategies across the devolved responsibilities.

Health care professionals are among the most passionate workers one will come across, and I have no doubt that they share a burning desire to make our health care system the best in the world, not for the good of our ego but for the good of our people. Last year, when health care was being debated in the US and the NHS's anniversary was being celebrated, we rightly focused on the benefits of universal health care. It is right that we ask that our NHS renew its focus on what lies at

its heart, which is delivery of patient-centred high-quality patient care.

I have no doubt that we have all heard tales of the person-centred approach being noticeable only by its absence. That can be traumatic for patients, particularly those who have no one to advocate for them or to ask questions on their behalf. Some patients or their families do not ask questions because of learning difficulties or a language barrier but, often, people simply do not do so because questioning doctors is something that is just not done, and because people do not like to trouble busy staff with their concerns. I am glad, therefore, to hear about the establishment of the patient advice and support service. I would be grateful if the minister could say something about how PAS staff will be able to support people with additional needs, such as language or learning difficulties.

On the other side of the equation, when we do not support our health care professionals enough to allow them to provide person-centred care, we limit their ability to get meaningful job satisfaction from their work, as the strategy points out on page 6. There is a clear correlation between staff wellness and patient outcomes; none of us will be surprised to hear that. One of the most exciting aspects of the strategy is its recognition of those fundamental connections in the health sector and its goal of utilising them for the benefit of all. Ask any fired-up health professional about their motivations and they will talk about their desire to provide high-quality treatment for patients. We therefore have a duty to ensure not only that we do not hinder their aspirations by hampering them with output-based bureaucracy, but that we provide the proper strategic support.

To give some balance to some of the amendments that are before us, I will quote a health board chief executive who recently gave evidence at the Public Audit Committee. With reference to the discussion about where efficiency savings will come from, Richard Carey from NHS Grampian stated that

“The levels of funding that we have enjoyed during the past few years have enabled us to grow the health service in a positive way”.

He went on to say that

“The situation in the future is going to be much more challenging”

—we all appreciate that—

“but we believe that we can deliver savings in the budget through effective management, good productivity and service redesign.”—[*Official Report, Public Audit Committee*, 24 March 2010; c 1609].

There was no mention of front-line services, and we did ask him about that.

My speech today strikes a mainly consensual note with members on most sides of the chamber, because although we may have different approaches, if we do not collaborate to improve care for the infirm in Scotland, we are in the wrong job. We do not have to indulge in the politics of the playground, with Jackie Baillie being the perfect head girl, just because the Labour Party wishes to.

Besides, consensus is a good thing and it has certainly been the week for it, at least until today. So far this week, there has been consensus among the Tories that they have no mandate in Scotland and therefore have had to appoint a consul general from the Lib Dem ranks, there has been consensus in Labour that it would rather sit back on the Opposition benches than form a coalition against Tory cuts and there has been consensus among the Liberal Democrats—yes, finally, a consensus among Liberal Democrats—that the faint whiff of power is enough to sweep them off their feet and into the chilling embrace of Osborne, Cameron and the rest of the Bullingdon Club in the corridors of Whitehall, so there has been consensus all round. I ask the Parliament to embrace that spirit of consensus by supporting the motion and commending the strategy.

16:21

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I will take my cue from Anne McLaughlin, who started her speech on a personal note. At Christmas time, I had treatment from the NHS—a small operation on my eye. I say, for the record, that I had the best treatment and was highly impressed.

The cabinet secretary gave us a feel for “The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland”. She mentioned matters such as waiting times and was generous to the previous Administration. I acknowledge that and thank her for those comments. She touched on issues such as NHS resources and, in his intervention, Jeremy Purvis properly brought in the rural aspect, which is, of course, extremely important to me. Nicola Sturgeon also made the point that if someone goes in to hospital for a day but gets a hospital-acquired infection, they can end up staying for a week. That is precisely what we must zero in on.

Jackie Baillie talked about leadership and about NHS board savings. She also went through a list of accusations—I think that that is the word to describe it. I am sure that, when the cabinet secretary looks at the *Official Report* of the debate, there will be things that she will want to check against the claims that have been made to see what the actuality is and whether the claims have substance. I will return to that point in my conclusion.

I intervened on Mary Scanlon's well-considered speech to pose a question because I had got the impression, perhaps slightly wrongly, that she was saying that she did not know why we need the health care quality strategy yet giving examples of things that were not quite right. I suggest, although I am prepared to be corrected, that the strategy will address those issues.

My colleague Ross Finnie is correct to say that there is a link to the Patient Rights (Scotland) Bill—I also see that link—and that the use of managementspeak, as wittily pointed out by Mr Finnie, is not useful in the strategy document, or ever, if we can possibly avoid it.

Ross Finnie made the point that the simple blanket prescription of going for, as outlined in our amendment, efficiencies of 2, 4 and 6 per cent is dangerous. I was interested in his comment that a witness said, in response to a question at the Health and Sport Committee about front-line services, "Ah well, it depends on how you define 'front-line.'" That is a cogent point and it is an issue that we must look at very closely because, by the simple use of different terminology, people can change the boundaries completely and it can mean that money can flow from one budget to another in the health service, but it could be exceedingly dangerous.

It is worth remembering the point that Malcolm Chisholm made at the beginning of his speech, which is that he is not contesting the history of this Administration over the past few years but taking a snapshot of the situation now as he sees it. Other members have touched on that aspect, too. Again, I will return to that in my concluding remarks.

Hugh O'Donnell's comments on communication methods were absolutely appropriate. There is a link there, is there not, to the use of managementspeak? If people do not get the communication right, they start to miss their targets and they will not be directing their resources where they are most needed.

Michael Matheson made a thoughtful contribution about trust in the professionals, which we all have. My own treatment left me with an element of trust. However, if the wrong measures are taken, trust is fatally undermined and something that is really rather special is corroded, because patients and the public do trust the health professionals. We need to restore and maintain that trust at all times.

The cabinet secretary will be glad to know that I am not going to talk about patient transport or ambulances in my constituency, which I have covered enough in the past. However, the first bullet point on page 15 of the strategy document is about something that is mentioned repeatedly throughout, which is people having an equal right

to health services no matter where they live. That has been behind my comments over the recent period about patient transport and ambulance services. To give members an example from my constituency, trade unions in Caithness have recently been in touch with me to say that they have evidence that NHS Highland may be planning to reduce the level of service that is offered by Dunbar hospital in Thurso. The issue is about a local service being delivered near where people live in Caithness, not in Inverness.

It would clearly be very worrying if there was any substance in what is claimed, because we want to keep as many services as local as possible. A linked issue is that, while we face decommissioning at Dounreay and the problems of trying to create alternative, high-quality economic developments, it is not helpful if health jobs are to be lost. As I said, the cabinet secretary will no doubt look at the claims that have been made about cuts or possible cuts—I do not necessarily agree with the claims. My personal plea is that she will look at what NHS Highland may or may not be proposing for Dunbar hospital. The position is a bit more under wraps than I would like—I see Mary Scanlon nodding to that. She, as a Highland member, and I, as the local member, wish we were slightly better informed about those matters. In their letter to me, the trade unions said that they had not been kept fully in the picture. There is an issue to do with communication there. Like Duncan McNeil, I would love to be proved wrong on this one. If there is nothing in it, that is fine and I withdraw my remarks. However, on a personal level, I ask the cabinet secretary to check the situation.

I ask members to support the amendment in my colleague Ross Finnie's name. I think that it is an important one and pertinent to the issue.

16:28

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): I was interested to see whether this would be an informative debate. By and large, it has turned out to be exactly that, with the exception, I am afraid, of one rather ugly contribution.

I have an early confession to make: I am afraid that I loathe reports such as the Scottish Government's "The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland". It is a particular turgid example of such reports, with poor use of grammar and high-blown, nonsensical rhetoric, which is the antithesis of the objective stated in its very first page to provide "Clear communication and explanation". Indeed, I was struck by the thought that we could easily dispense with anaesthetists by giving patients this report to read instead. I had an overpowering sense of its being the collective work of a brainstorming seminar, with breakout

groups all contributing their thoughts to be collated into meaningless corporate speak by a drafting team of the underemployed. I agree entirely with what Ross Finnie said about this aspect, although of course he said it in his own way. No amount of dressing up since the draft report last year can disguise that. None of this is to avoid the fact that the issues discussed in the report are of the greatest importance, nor to disagree with nearly all the essentials that can be distilled from the document.

Finally, having negotiated the seemingly endless pages, I was somewhat dismayed to find that by far the longest stretch of the text about final steps in the "Implementation" section was devoted to the proposal to spend money on a widespread communications programme, which is in essence a marketing exercise that will no doubt be costly and divert money yet further away from front-line services.

In the foreword to the report, we are introduced to the key ambitions that the people of Scotland have for their NHS, which are caring and compassionate staff and services; clear communication and explanation about conditions and treatment; effective collaboration between clinicians, patients and others; a clean and safe environment; continuity of care and good access to care; and clinical excellence. We agree with those aims. We agree with and applaud the progress towards achieving the objectives that is being made, often on the basis of natural common sense, by a dedicated NHS staff. I therefore return to Mary Scanlon's point about whether NHS staff really need to be trained in those notions and objectives by absorbing such a complicated document. She was right to suggest that, to dedicated staff who have worked hard for many years, the report will seem fairly condescending.

In Nicola Sturgeon's favour, we can say that the Government has further facilitated progress towards several of the objectives in the report. Earlier, for the first time in three years in the Parliament, I found myself in agreement with Michael Matheson—I have no doubt that that will be enormously discomfiting to him—as he explained the relationship between public trust and clinical quality. That is an issue on which we receive many complaints from the public. Those often relate not to big operations but to small or minor ones. Somebody goes in for something relatively trivial, trusting that the process will work, yet the quality process breaks down and they end up with a much more serious issue.

We must face the enormous financial black hole that Labour has created and which we face as a nation. In different ways, various parties—at least, those that are now in power—have made commitments to the NHS. The new coalition

Government, which I and my very new and very dear friends Ross Finnie and Jamie Stone wish every success, has committed that

"funding for the NHS should increase in real terms in each year of the Parliament".

That will produce consequentials for the NHS in Scotland. It would be appropriate for the cabinet secretary to pledge today that any such consequentials that arise will go to the NHS in Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am happy to do that. In fact, I am more than surprised that Jackson Carlaw was not watching the First Minister in the BBC leaders debate during the election campaign, when I believe he did the very thing that the member seeks. Even if Jackson Carlaw does not listen to the First Minister, I know that he always listens to me and I am therefore happy to give him that pledge.

Jackson Carlaw: Sadly, I was campaigning, completely in vain, elsewhere.

In the face of that financial pressure, we must note that the cabinet secretary has chosen to spend front-line cash on free prescriptions for herself and the First Minister and for all those people who will not now benefit from increases in inheritance tax thresholds. Indeed, the only tax cut that is being offered on a plate to millionaires—an issue on which the cabinet secretary and her colleagues expressed profound consternation only a week ago—is the one that she is awarding to them.

The refrain that Jackie Baillie rehearsed of cuts, cuts and more cuts is inherently untrue. There is no surprise there, although we all expect to hear the refrain become a mantra. Jackie Baillie did not mention that, had Labour been re-elected last week, the national health service in Scotland would have had to fund £36 million of increased national insurance employer contributions, as was confirmed by the Scottish Government. Jackie Baillie, who said that she was looking forward greatly to the budget in 50 days, can do so in the certain knowledge that it will not have Labour's £36 million tax hike on the NHS in Scotland, the money for which would no doubt have had to be found from front-line services.

It is self-evident that more money will not in itself be enough, and that is acknowledged by the report. The report's summary of future challenges illustrates again the problems with which we will be confronted as a result of an ageing population, a continuing shift in the pattern of disease towards long-term conditions and growing numbers of old people with multiple conditions and complex needs. Even with the guarantee of additional real-terms increases in funding, we must be smarter in the use of cash. We have to say to health boards

that we do not expect that cuts to front-line services are in any way inevitable, as Jackie Baillie's amendment postures. Nor must we accept the choices that health boards make, particularly NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which has a rather unenviable and questionable record on responding to public priorities.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: Not just now.

I turn to something that a former secretary of state did when asked to find efficiencies within his department. He would turn to his civil servants and find the most sensationally unacceptable recommendations, so that those could be publicly postured and become completely unacceptable to the public. He could then go to the Prime Minister and say, "We simply can't do this." I hope that, in seeking to find efficiencies, health boards do not try to undermine the exercise by simply trying to identify efficiencies that are completely unacceptable to the public. It is necessary to find efficiencies to redeploy resources towards front-line services in the face of the demographic changes that are coming. The health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland cannot become a game of poker. The challenges presented by those demographic changes and the treatment of avoidable conditions will inevitably lead to even greater pressures on the NHS.

The aims of the report are sound enough but, if they are not to be undermined, we will need to achieve the efficiency targets that have been established. Our amendment invites the cabinet secretary to report back to Parliament by the end of the summer recess on how the Government intends to respond to the needs that are highlighted in the report while protecting vital front-line services.

16:35

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife (Lab): Quality improvement is about the effective implementation of Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network guidelines, which we have had since 1997. We are not in a new situation. Quality improvement has not just suddenly landed on the table. As the cabinet secretary said, it is about building on what has been done before.

The patient experience, to which Malcolm Chisholm referred, is crucial. That partnership is the new element that has come in over the past few years, although the patient's journey, care and outcomes have long been the NHS's focus. As the cabinet secretary, Duncan McNeil and Michael Matheson said, the initial problems that we as a Parliament faced in 1999—of unacceptable waiting times in accident and emergency, long delays in getting appointments, difficulties in

obtaining diagnostic tests and longer delays in getting treatment—have largely been addressed, although there are some exceptions, which a number of members mentioned. For example, people simply cannot get bariatric surgery, which has not been mentioned, in Fife—the board will not provide it at all. That sort of postcode lottery is unacceptable, given that we are trying to achieve a universal service.

However, we have many examples of improved quality of care and improved efficiency. One of the best examples is in renal dialysis. Over the past 13 to 15 years, a trend has developed of providing satellite units for home dialysis, which has transformed the lives of many renal failure patients. It is just a pity that the proposed NHS Ayrshire and Arran unit is now on hold. We must recognise that it will be difficult to address some of the quality issues that we face if new money is required to do so.

There are other successes, such as the patient safety programme, the better together programme and developments in anticipatory care, which Malcolm Chisholm mentioned.

Iatrogenic problems—problems caused by the very treatment that is being instigated—can sometimes be fatal. Regrettably, those problems have not always been given a high enough priority. In 2008, only one medical undergraduate course in Scotland was teaching patient safety. To embed a strategy in the health service, we have to start with undergraduate training. How many Scottish universities include quality improvement and patient safety in their undergraduate curriculum for medical, dental, nursing and allied health professional students?

The Tayside pilot that commenced as part of a UK-wide patient safety initiative in 2004—Tayside was the Scottish representative—has massively reduced problems in Ninewells. Which health boards or hospitals were part of the extension of the original four pilot sites to 20 sites throughout Scotland, and what were the results?

We have a lot further to go. For example, there has been a collective failure by all Administrations since devolution to implement electronic prescribing. There is excellent research to show that the reduction in errors that can be achieved by electronic prescribing is substantial. It would also save a considerable amount of funding in a number of clerical jobs, which could be diverted elsewhere.

Quality and efficiency should be synonymous, but, unfortunately, they have not been so. Indeed, too often in the past the way to make savings was through cuts, which impaired quality.

There have been two streams in existence since 1997: clinical governance and quality

improvement, which are not the same thing. Clinical governance is about quality assurance—examining results and deciding whether they were good quality—whereas quality improvement is about the total effect throughout the system of making change. I regret that the strategy says nothing about the necessary integration of those two streams, which could lead to improvement.

We know the risk to the quality improvement agenda of efficiencies and cash-releasing savings—evidence of the dangers of such an approach has begun to emerge. Warnings from the BMA and the RCN herald the renewal of across-the-board cuts, and skill mixes are being used that involve applying specialist nurse skills inappropriately. For example, in Glasgow, specialist nurses are being put back on wards, so their skills are not being fully used. At the other end is the risky deployment of staff beyond their skill level. If that happens, we will be in difficulty.

Boards are failing to replace staff who are on maternity leave or long-term sick leave. That places burdens on the remaining staff and increases stress, which leads to additional sickness. The Health and Sport Committee learned yesterday that vacancy management is expected to produce savings of £4 million for one health board that appeared before us and £1 million for another health board that was represented, so that will be important. However, if it simply means stopping the filling of vital posts, it will reduce front-line services. We therefore need to understand what vacancy management is about.

My experience of vacancy management was not good. To save money, the posts of people who gave due notice of retiral were not advertised, even when those posts were critical. The consequent delay in appointment—and, sometimes, the necessary appointment of locums when the system was at breaking point—was more costly in the end, so what was intended was not achieved. Substantial stress was also created for the rest of the team.

It is clear that we need to consider the skill mix and that reviewing the workforce is important. How we do that is also important—it must be done sensitively.

Audit Scotland's report "Day surgery in Scotland" showed that Scotland still lags behind England on the number of day-surgery procedures that are undertaken. At yesterday's Health and Sport Committee meeting, I did not question NHS Tayside's representative on day surgery, but the report says that NHS Tayside is in a low category for several procedures and that it is a long way from achieving the targets on 16 procedures. If we reached the targets, that would save money and improve the experience for patients, as Duncan

McNeil said. When patients enter hospital just for the day, they are much less likely to develop hospital-acquired infection.

My colleague Jackie Baillie talked about cuts, to which our amendment refers. It is a fact that the NHS in Scotland has received lower increases than has the NHS in England since the current Government took office. Of the £900 million of additional money that was put into this year's Scottish budget, £274 million will go to health. I welcome that, but SNP members cannot have it both ways. A funding increase should protect front-line jobs. The cuts that my colleague Jackie Baillie outlined of 1,250 staff in Glasgow and 700 staff in Lothian—and other cuts—show that the situation will have to be examined carefully. Cutting cleaning hours at Glasgow royal infirmary is incomprehensible. On cutting volunteer drivers, the Minister for Public Health might confirm in summing up that Duncan McNeil represented his constituents successfully. However, to be frank, the cabinet secretary and the minister do not have enough fingers to stick into the holes that are beginning to appear in the dykes. They cannot resolve such problems one by one—a global strategy must deal with them.

We must consider several issues. As Ross Finnie said, we must define front-line care. The response yesterday—"It depends what you mean by 'front-line care'"—was disappointing.

I concur with Mary Scanlon and Jackson Carlaw's analysis of the strategy. It is apple pie—it contains nice fluffy aspirations, but it is not even as cunning as a cunning plan by Blackadder's Baldrick. No one could speak against it, but it fails on almost every count. Some counts on which it fails are astonishing. It fails to examine closely the quality improvement actions of the past 20 years. It fails to analyse the hugely successful Scottish pilot in Tayside, to which I referred. It does not talk about the successful lean in Lothian programme. It does not mention quality improvement techniques and tools such as lean, total quality management, continuous quality improvement, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's plan-do-study-act system, business process re-engineering or six sigma. There is no indication of what is being done. It does not refer to the work, sponsored by the health department and published in 2009, by Powell, Rushmer and Davies, involving Dr Twaddle, which is an excellent summary and review of quality improvement and how it needs to be embedded. It does not tell us whether the health department is supporting the embedding of quality improvement in every board or has a role in facilitating boards' efforts to tackle the barriers that the strategy indicates are present in a number of areas.

The strategy makes no reference to training of board members, executive and non-executive, or lead clinicians. It does not talk about the co-ordinators of the managed care networks that underpin the developing collaborative system in Scotland. Embedding quality improvement techniques in those networks is fundamental. It does not suggest what steps might be taken, after NHS Tayside's success in backfilling in Tayside, to allow staff from there to play a mentoring role in other boards when that work is rolled out, as we have been told it will be. We do not know what quality improvement networks have been established. As Mary Scanlon indicated, we are also concerned about the fact that there is no security for whistleblowers, which will become vital as we move forward into a period of greater austerity.

The strategy mentions quality ambitions, quality outcome measures and a quality measurement framework that will be produced. It also refers to a number of committees: a quality alliance, a quality improvement hub and an NHS strategic oversight group. I detect a growing confusion of the sort that we had with HAI. I am very disappointed by the strategy, which is light and weak and lacks the focus that is present in the department. One member referred to it as a "work in progress"—that is exactly what it is.

We all want quality. It is vital that we have efficiency, but it is also vital that we do not return to the situation that existed in the 1980s, when efficiency savings meant cuts. Such cuts were made repeatedly across the board, with management presenting clinicians such as me with statements requiring us to cut 3 per cent from our budgets for the year, even if we had made substantial savings in the previous year and had improved efficiency. We must be far more sophisticated than that. Regrettably, the strategy does not provide the basis for such an approach.

16:48

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I am grateful to all members for their participation in and contribution to the debate. We are implementing the health care quality strategy for the NHS in Scotland to support our NHS in delivering the best health care services to the people of Scotland, in a way that responds to what people have told us that they want and need. We are confident that, by doing that, we can make Scotland a world leader in health care quality. We are also confident that, through that shared approach, the NHS will not only be able to deliver the highest-quality health care, but be better placed to respond to the economic and social challenges that lie ahead. Our confidence in our

ability in Scotland to achieve those aims for the NHS is built on a strong foundation.

I say to Jackie Baillie that it is not good enough for the spokesperson for the major Opposition party in the Parliament to come to an important debate and offer absolutely nothing by way of constructive proposals, constructive criticism or anything else. She gave a rant that was a single transferable speech. To be fair to her back benchers and, to some degree, to Richard Simpson, her speech stood in stark contrast to theirs.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister give way?

Shona Robison: I will let the member in later.

Let me put some facts on the record. First, there will be no compulsory redundancies in the NHS. That is a real achievement, given the squeeze on the Scottish Government budget as a result of the £500 million of cuts from Westminster.

Secondly, although there might be changes in how the community maternity unit in the Vale of Leven hospital operates, as Jackie Baillie said, at least the unit is still there. That would not have been the case under Labour, which was absolutely intent on closing it. Only the action of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing overturned the proposals to close the unit that were on the table. Let us have facts, not fiction.

Another fact is that there are 10,000 more staff working in the NHS than there were before the SNP Government came to power in 2007. Those 10,000 extra staff are delivering improvement in the quality of patient care. I do not mind debating points in the Parliament, but debates must be based on fact and not scaremongering, which was the whole basis of Jackie Baillie's speech. The staff in the NHS and the patients who receive NHS services deserve better from the political leaders in the Parliament.

Jackie Baillie: Speaking of facts, is the minister denying NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's workforce projections, in which 1,252 staff are cut? Is she denying that NHS Lothian said that 700 jobs would be lost? Is she denying NHS Tayside's reduction of £30 million? Is she guaranteeing that that will have no impact on front-line services? She cannot have it both ways.

Shona Robison: The Labour Party cannot have it both ways, either. The Labour Party cannot make cuts of £500 million in the Scottish Budget and then assert that somehow those cuts have no impact on how public services are delivered.

We expect our health boards to leave no stone unturned in ensuring that in delivering the health service with their budget, including the extra £264 million that they have, they protect front-line

services. I would have thought that all members would get behind health boards in doing that.

I pick up Jackie Baillie on another point. In her litany of accusations, she criticised changes to hospital-based mental health services for the elderly. However, only a few weeks ago Jackie Baillie stood up at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities convention to back changes that shift resources from hospitals to communities. Is not that a case of a member saying one thing in the Parliament and something completely different outside the Parliament? That is not good enough.

More constructive speeches were made. Mary Scanlon asked why it was necessary in the strategy document to restate the key aims of the NHS. I think that the cabinet secretary explained well why it was important to do so. Ross Finnie and Jamie Stone talked about managementspeak. In a spirit of consensus, we concede that there is some managementspeak in the document. That does not detract from the important substance of the document. Any Government document might contain similar language—Liberal Democrats might find that some of their UK Government documents contain managementspeak.

Ross Finnie: At least the syntax and grammar would be correct.

Shona Robison: Christine Grahame, in her considered speech, referred to the useful evidence that was put on the record at the Health and Sport Committee.

Duncan McNeil's speech was very constructive, in the main. However, in his intervention, he talked about reducing the IT budget for health. I remind him that Labour's proposal last year to cut the e-health budget would have really damaged the IT budget of the health service. He asked me specifically about the health service in his constituency and I asked him about a letter that is winging its way to him. He can read for himself the detail of that letter, but the last line says:

"I understand that further discussions between representatives of the Ardgowan Hospice and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde regarding funding have now taken place and that a funding arrangement agreeable to both sides, has been reached."

I hope that Duncan McNeil will welcome that in the spirit in which it is intended.

Duncan McNeil: A press release from Lorraine Dick, senior press officer for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, this week stated that there is clearly an issue:

"the hospice is actively pursuing new sources of funding to help us continue the much appreciated transport service."

There has been a cut. I look to the minister and the cabinet secretary to ensure that we continue to

provide that voluntary transport service, for which the funding has been cut.

Shona Robison: I advise Duncan McNeil that the service is continuing and that an arrangement has been reached that is agreeable to both sides. He does the people at Ardgowan hospice no service when they have reached an agreement with the health board that is to their satisfaction. I suggest that, if it is good enough for them, it should be good enough for Duncan McNeil.

Malcolm Chisholm made a constructive, if at times challenging, speech. He showed that he understands well the issues behind what is involved and could perhaps teach his front-bench colleagues a thing or two about how to get a point across in a more effective way. He showed that he had read the document—so, full marks to him. We will reflect on the issues that he raised when we read the *Official Report* of the debate.

Anne McLaughlin talked about the patient advice and support service, which will be for every patient, recognising individual needs. Communication support and translation is a significant aspect of the proposed service. I hope that that answers her question.

Jackson Carlaw made some important points in his summing-up speech, not the least of which was the important point that the £36 million of resources that the NHS in Scotland would have had to find—it would have had to come from somewhere, perhaps putting pressure on front-line budgets—will no longer have to be found following the rejection of Labour's national insurance hike. That was an important point to make.

The strategy will not deliver change overnight, but it goes to the heart of what the NHS is all about. Staff in the NHS tell us that they chose to work in the NHS instead of working in other sectors because they wanted to deliver the best quality of care and treatment to patients. That is how the quality strategy came into being: it was driven by what the staff—and, equally important, the patients—were telling us that they wanted. We are absolutely committed to implementing the quality strategy and supporting everyone in Scotland to play their part in ensuring that our NHS delivers the health care that everyone wants and needs, now and into the future.

We have demonstrated why we believe that NHS Scotland can become a world leader. I am confident that everyone here supports that aim, which has been embraced by the NHS in Scotland. I hope that everyone will work with us to pursue the ambitions that we have set out in the quality strategy for our NHS.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-6266.1, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6266, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6266, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)

McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Garscaldie) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
 (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
 (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)
 (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 0, Abstentions 55.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-5673, in the name of John Swinney, on the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill's financial resolution, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill, agrees to any increase in expenditure of a kind referred to in paragraph 3(b)(iii) of Rule 9.12 of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6295.3, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6295, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the NHS quality strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)

Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
 (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
 (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)
 (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber)
 (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)

Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 62, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6295.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6295, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the NHS quality strategy, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S3M-6295.2, in the name of Ross Finnie, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6295, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the NHS quality strategy, 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)

Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 57, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6295, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the NHS quality strategy, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament commends *The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland* as the right approach, at the right time, to delivering the highest quality healthcare to everybody in Scotland, responding to what they want, need and deserve and, through this, to ensuring that the quality of healthcare services across NHS Scotland becomes recognised as among the best in the world, and calls on the Scottish Government to report back to the Parliament by the end of summer recess on how it intends to respond to the needs highlighted in the report, *The Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHSScotland*, in order to protect NHS frontline services.

Encouraging Dynamic Global Entrepreneurs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-5959, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on "Pushed off the EDGE". It will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses its concern that the Encouraging Dynamic Global Entrepreneurs (EDGE) programme has been cancelled; understands that EDGE is an innovative, international entrepreneurial programme that brings together students from leading Scottish universities, fifth-year school pupils in the Dumbarton constituency and in the rest of Scotland and students from international universities; further understands that the students form consultancy teams working on projects with Scottish businesses; considers that, in the four years that EDGE has been operating, it has equipped Scotland's pupils and students with an understanding about business needs; notes that EDGE has also helped businesses to grow and develop, with projected outcomes of £24.6 million turnover, £3 million profits and 264 jobs created; further considers that the benefit to young Scottish students at both high school and university level is invaluable, and would welcome discussion by all those involved to secure the future of the programme.

17:06

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about the pioneering EDGE project, which has been running with great success since 2005. The project brings together students from leading Scottish and international universities and fifth-year school pupils to form consultancy teams that work with small and medium-sized businesses throughout the west of Scotland on market research and business improvement plans that are then implemented.

Since its inception, some 600 students have participated in the programme, which has received widespread acclaim from teachers, students and business leaders alike. Simply put, EDGE has given Scotland's pupils and students a unique insight into the needs and working environment of businesses, it has helped businesses to grow and to develop, it has increased turnover by £24.6 million, it has saved £1.1 million—I am sure that that will be of interest to the Government—and, in its very short history, it has created £3 million in profit and 264 new jobs. Regrettably, this crucial asset to enterprise and education is now under threat; this year's EDGE programme has been cancelled. It is the first time in EDGE's short history that a programme has been cancelled.

Before I address the problem, I wish to reflect on and reinforce the value of the project. As I have

indicated, its benefits are self-evident—but members should not take it from me. We set up a "Save the EDGE" Facebook site, which I am quite proud of. It has almost 300 members, who comprise alumni and businesses alike. They have given overwhelming support for the programme. I would like to read two of the responses that we have received in support of EDGE. Nigel Chadwick of Stream Communications, one of the many businesses that has participated in EDGE, said:

"Internationalism and the positive business and cultural impact of such programmes should be high on the Scottish Government's agenda. Programmes such as this should be valued for the part they play in effecting international attitude and integrated working from an early age."

Irene Cullen, who is a schoolteacher at Hermitage academy in Helensburgh, said of the programme:

"All the pupils who took part in the EDGE programme gained a huge amount of experience, maturity, an understanding of business, confidence, leadership skills, great examples of working in a team, meeting deadlines, friends and contacts for life, new job aspirations, and no doubt encouraged some young people who will go into business that would not have considered it before."

Surely members agree that those are the very qualities and skills that we wish to be utilised and instilled in Scotland's school leavers today. Indeed, higher education institutions and employers consistently stress that among the most vital skills for successful job seekers are the experience of business and work, and the life experience, that projects such as EDGE offer. A simple crisis of funding puts all that in jeopardy.

In previous years, EDGE has been built on a partnership between Scottish Enterprise, universities, Careers Scotland—which, of course, is now Skills Development Scotland—local authorities and Scottish businesses. It has been part funded by Scottish Enterprise; European funding has made up about 55 per cent of the balance. Scottish universities have made in-kind contributions in the form of staff time and facilities.

This year, Scottish Enterprise has announced that, given its funding restrictions, it does not believe that projects such as EDGE form part of its core business. It has attempted to transfer responsibility to Skills Development Scotland, but no transfer has actually taken place and this year's programme has been cancelled. The future of EDGE has been left hanging in the balance. There are no guarantees or commitments for funding in the future. That is unacceptable. That we should let a valuable and dynamic education and enterprise project be cancelled, taking crucial opportunities away from students and businesses alike, is deeply regrettable. Given that it is the stated aim of Scottish Enterprise to improve the environment in which Scottish businesses operate, I question the judgment that programmes such as

EDGE no longer form a core part of Scottish Enterprise's work.

It is a question of money. As I understand it, Scottish Enterprise's budget has fallen by something like 21 per cent in real terms and the organisation has undergone a 40 per cent reduction in size—yet the chief executive receives the same £200,000 salary as her predecessor. That is more than the Prime Minister is paid. There is more, however. Information I have obtained from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre indicates that in an average year one in five staff in Scottish Enterprise receive a bonus on top of their salary. In the financial year 2008-09, bonus payments amounted to £214,000 across the organisation. The cost of the EDGE project in 2009 totalled £360,000, of which more than half can come from European funding. All that is needed is about £170,000. That is not a huge amount of money when set against some of the salaries and bonuses that I have been talking about. Ultimately, it is a question of priorities. Whether such lucrative salaries and substantial bonuses are justifiable in the face of losing valuable projects such as EDGE is deeply questionable.

EDGE is a valuable and profitable asset for business, education and opportunity in Scotland. Such projects equip young people with crucial skills for the future and bring tangible benefits to business.

I will conclude by quoting an EDGE participant:

"EDGE was the most worthwhile experience I had during the course of my university career. The business experience I received was second to none and has impacted massively on my future career direction. It is such a worthwhile cause to have a business programme open to students of all disciplines, proving that good business sense and creativity can come from all subject areas. In the current economic climate, programmes such as EDGE are more vital than ever."

I could not agree more. I hope that the minister will guarantee the future of the EDGE programme. Anything less would be a complete travesty.

17:13

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing the debate. I also recognise the significant contribution that a former friend and colleague of mine, Mr Martin Jack from Think Different Events, has made to EDGE. He has worked closely with the EDGE programme over the past few years. I know Ms Baillie has been a supporter of the EDGE programme, which started in Dunbartonshire with just one Scottish and one American university, participating with local schools. The rationale behind EDGE was to

"generate business improvement and to focus on the needs of companies".

The programme has grown significantly and received positive evaluations on a number of occasions.

I was very pleased to see the programme extended to Ayrshire in 2008. Since then, I have acted as host for the parliamentary visit that has been a key part of the cultural programme for participants. During each of those visits I was hugely impressed by the enthusiasm of the young people who participated—there have been up to 160 participants. Taking questions from so many on business-related issues as they affect Scotland and our place in the world was quite daunting but very rewarding. Last summer, they were very keen to try to understand the business decision Diageo reached when it decided to close the Johnnie Walker plant in Kilmarnock. That was a particularly difficult question; I still do not understand the decision myself. The EDGE students were very interested and concerned about that news.

I was copied in on an e-mail that one of my constituents, Elizabeth Young from Newmiln, who took part in the programme in 2005, sent to the minister. I would like to extract a couple of sentences from Elizabeth's e-mail, which emphasise the point about double benefit for students and employers. She wrote:

"I strongly believe that university students are a key group to target to promote entrepreneurialism. They are at a good point to be able to build on the skills gained at EDGE and at university to turn these into something productive."

She continued:

"It soon became apparent that the companies all valued what we offered and more importantly, we were working on projects that the companies were desperate to complete but either did not have time to do or could not afford the normal consultancy fees."

The EDGE programme appears to offer a real win-win: the young people and businesses involved and Scottish Enterprise achieve real benefits.

We are slowly emerging from the worst recession that our country has faced for many years. Apart from its short-term effects, the recession has thrown up huge questions about the future direction of Scotland's economy. We have been experiencing a rundown in our manufacturing base for as long as I can remember. More and more of our companies are branch plants or subsidiaries of multinational companies. That makes us dependent on decisions that are taken elsewhere, over which we have little influence. To address that, we need to reconnect our young people to the world of business and particularly to the world of making things, of scientific and technical innovation, and of new business start-ups.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the EDGE programme is that it is not exclusively aimed at students who are already studying business. Two of the participating Scottish universities open the course to all their undergraduates, while the University of Strathclyde targets it at students in just one department—electronic and electrical engineering. The wide student base offers the possibility that participants in the programme emerge with exactly the mix of skills they need, a technical and product-oriented education and, crucially, an appreciation of how business works.

The most recent evaluation identified some issues about how the programme operates that could perhaps be improved. That is inevitable as we develop our ideas about how to shape our business future.

I have received assurances that Scottish Enterprise has not cancelled the programme entirely but has postponed this year's event, perhaps, as the minister might be able to confirm later, to allow some reconfiguration to take place. If that is the case, I look forward to the early commencement of work towards a further round of the EDGE programme in 2011. I am, of course, willing to be grilled in front of another live audience in the Scottish Parliament should that be a desirable component of any future programme.

17:17

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing the debate and bringing to the chamber an issue that is important not only in her constituency but throughout Scotland.

As the economy recovers from the worst recession in 60 years, we should all agree that efforts must be focused on equipping people with the knowledge, skills and fresh ideas to help to secure economic recovery and develop Scotland's economy. As Jackie Baillie and Willie Coffey said, the EDGE programme is a valuable project that brings together senior school pupils and students from Scottish and international universities to gain important business skills and experience, but it also greatly benefits the small and medium-sized businesses that take part. Since its creation in 2005, EDGE has given 600 students a greater practical knowledge of business, enabling them to generate fresh ideas, to develop small firms and to gain valuable experience to equip them for the global economy.

EDGE is based on strong partnership working, and it has been highly praised and independently positively assessed. As Jackie Baillie discussed, Scottish Enterprise found that the programme generated more than £24 million in turnover and

264 jobs, and found £1.1 million-worth of cost savings for the small and medium-sized enterprises that have been involved. Those would be impressive figures for any Government department, never mind a programme whose annual costs total just £360,000.

A criticism that is often levelled at graduates by employees is that, once out of university, they lack the full range of skills that companies need. Universities are increasingly alert to that and we have seen efforts to address the issue and make graduates more relevant to business. They include the University of Aberdeen's curriculum reform and the way in which the University of Abertay Dundee's games department engages positively with the sector. In addition to what universities can do, providing opportunities such as EDGE, with direct support and involvement from Scottish Enterprise among others, gives students valuable experience, which is often difficult to get.

EDGE is also valuable in the way that it involves senior school pupils in working alongside university students. The experience provides school pupils with an understanding and appreciation of the value of a university education and gives students life skills and confidence to take into further or higher education. We have seen a significant expansion in the numbers of young people entering further and higher education, but Scotland still has a significant problem retaining some groups of students. By providing young people with greater confidence and certainty about what they can achieve, programmes such as EDGE can play a role in addressing drop-out rates.

EDGE has also been shown to encourage some young people to go into business who might never previously have considered that as an option. We often talk about the reluctance and lack of confidence among certain groups of young people. Programmes such as EDGE can go a long way towards raising their aspirations. In future years the Scottish economy will have much to offer, but we need people with the skills, confidence and understanding to develop and grow new businesses.

Programmes such as EDGE can also benefit university students who come from non-traditional backgrounds. Such students often find it more difficult to make use of networks and contacts and often find it more difficult to take advantage of unpaid internships or work experience. EDGE provided such students with rewarding experiences that opened up more opportunities to them. In an increasingly competitive work market, a degree that is boosted by practical experience and a proven track record in business can give many students a head start.

For all those reasons, I share Jackie Baillie's concerns that the EDGE programme for the coming year has been cancelled and its future funding has not yet been secured, despite the scheme's benefits being very relevant in the current economic climate. Following the cancellation of the graduates for business scheme—we are still waiting news on what will replace that—the cancellation of EDGE raises further concerns. In those changes, the Scottish Government must ensure that it does not damage our ability to get the dialogue going between young students and businesses, as that dialogue will reap benefits not only for those involved but for Scotland as a whole.

17:21

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): I apologise that I will need to leave immediately after my speech to participate in another meeting elsewhere in Parliament, but I assure Jackie Baillie that no discourtesy is intended. I say that with slight apprehension because, having just participated in the previous rather combative debate, I fear that my speech might appear to be not quite as conciliatory as is normally the case in members' business debates.

I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing the debate and I do not necessarily disagree with her motion or with what she said in her speech. However, I have a duty to point out that, in the final analysis, the issue provides another salutary lesson on the mindset of Labour politicians that ensures that every Labour Government in history—including the one that has just been removed from office—leaves our country with the cupboard bare and the economy in tatters.

As she invariably does—she did so in the previous debate and her leader, Iain Gray, did so at First Minister's question time earlier—Jackie Baillie protests about cuts while forgetting about the state of the UK's finances after 13 years of Labour. At the beginning of 2009, Labour's debt stood at £602 billion. By 2013, it will break through the £1 trillion barrier, which will be the largest debt that this country has faced in its history. Over the same period, for Ms Baillie's own backyard of West Dunbartonshire, the share of Labour's debt will increase from £900 million to £1.6 billion. In short, the UK stands on the brink of bankruptcy thanks to 13 years of apparently prudent Labour chancellors boasting about spending money, which we did not have, without any reference to what, if anything, that spending would achieve. However, despite Labour having been voted from office for having bust the bank and for having taken us through the longest and deepest economic recession in living memory—Claire Baker referred to that—Jackie Baillie still thinks

that we are not spending enough and still leads the protests whenever a decision is made to start tackling the problem by eliminating non-essential expenditure.

Does Jackie Baillie think that our historic debts are not high enough? Has the Labour Party discovered that we were all wrong and that money grows on trees? If that is the case, and if there is a crock of gold at the end of the rainbow, will Labour guarantee this time not to sell it off as soon as gold prices have fallen to rock bottom?

Jackie Baillie: I genuinely regret the tone of the member's speech. Will he reflect on the fact that the EDGE programme is about encouraging entrepreneurship and business development and growth? That is absolutely where the country needs to be. In addition, I proffered the suggestion not just that funding might be taken from Europe but that consideration might be given to paying for the programme by reducing some of the bonuses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Before the member continues his speech, I advise him that he has been very general in his first two minutes. I would like to hear some more references to the meat of the motion in the remaining two minutes.

Jackson Carlaw: As the Conservatives argued in our previous Scottish Parliament manifesto, one organisation that is ripe for having its budget trimmed back is Scottish Enterprise. I do not disagree with the points that Jackie Baillie identified in her speech, but they are a reason not necessarily to spend the money elsewhere but to reduce Scottish Enterprise's budget further. Although I have no doubt that Scottish Enterprise does many valuable things, in the current economic situation it cannot continue to do everything that it currently does.

I have no doubt that many people will be disappointed that the EDGE programme is not to be supported this year. I am willing and happy to accept all that Jackie Baillie has said about the success that it has achieved, but it is not the first programme to be discontinued as we seek to pay back Labour's debt, nor will it be the last.

Just because the scheme is no longer to be funded by the taxpayer, that is not to say that it needs to cease to exist altogether. If it is as successful and as beneficial to business, to young people and to enterprise as Ms Baillie suggests in her motion and in her speech, there is no reason to believe that the programme must be funded directly and entirely by the state or via one of its agencies. There is always the possibility that the private or voluntary sector will have to step in to reinvent the programme in one form or another, should that be felt necessary, and should organisations find that that is the priority for their

funding in the current economic situation. That will have to be how many such schemes are funded now.

To the students who will be disappointed by the imminent ending of EDGE in its current form, I say that they should take heart from the news that, by not funding such schemes, we can ensure that Labour's proposed jobs tax will not be imposed on business, which will increase their employment opportunities. As they leave their studies, they can also take heart from the fact that we are seeking—and Governments are seeking—to reduce debt, which will have a direct impact on their future.

Would it be nice if all such existing projects—EDGE is one of a number of them—could continue to be funded, as well as others that might be proposed or that politicians might feel to be worth while? The answer to that is yes. However, can we afford that right now? I am afraid that the answer is no.

17:26

Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I apologise to Jackie Baillie for not signing her motion. I said that I would sign it but, unfortunately, due to an oversight I was not able to do so. I congratulate her on lodging the motion for debate.

I was intrigued by the EDGE programme, so I did some homework and research on it and I met and spoke to Jackie Baillie to go over exactly what the programme has delivered. I looked through various papers, because I had some trepidation about exactly what it does deliver. Having done that research and having spoken to various MSPs, I found that EDGE delivers a very good programme.

I was rather concerned to hear Scottish Enterprise say that, because of "budget constraints", to use the phrase that its representatives used when speaking to me about it, it could not continue the 2010 programme. I have some questions, which I hope the minister can answer. I am sure that I asked Jackie Baillie these questions previously. Perhaps my speech will contain more questions than answers.

As Jackie Baillie's motion mentions, the programme has projected outcomes of £24.6 million in turnover, £1.1 million in cost savings, £3 million in profits and 264 jobs created. Do we have the figures behind that, showing what the programme has actually delivered? The motion says "projected outcomes". I spoke to Jackie Baillie about this. How many students from Scottish universities take part in the EDGE programme? I know about the involvement of the University of Strathclyde and Dumbarton academy. Following my research, I note that students from Columbia University in New York,

from Simon Fraser University in Canada and from the University of Warsaw came over here to participate in the programme. It is a very good programme, but we must consider the facts, and I want to get some more numbers.

In considering what the costs are, we find out from the Columbia University centre for career education that the EDGE programme involves "pre-departure training", which there absolutely should be, and a

"£150 per week stipend for the duration of the program"

for students who come over from Columbia. "Housing for eight weeks" is also mentioned. I am not saying that we should not contribute to that, but I have done some research into Columbia University, and most students there are quite well off. If we are talking about saving some money, I wonder whether they might contribute a wee bit towards the costs of the programme.

It is fantastic when we think about what entrepreneurs achieve, but the nub of the matter, for me, is to find out exactly what Scottish university students get from EDGE. Do the figures that I have quoted from the website that is cited in Jackie Baillie's motion add up? Have those 264 jobs actually been created? I would like to see evidence of that.

Jackie Baillie: Perhaps before the evening is over, I can share with the member the EDGE evaluation that was undertaken by EKOS Ltd, which sets out exactly the basis of the figures that are quoted in the motion.

Sandra White: I thank Jackie Baillie. That is the type of evidence I am looking for. As I said, it is important that we encourage our university students and young people to mix with the rest of the world, and that we bring entrepreneurial skills to Scotland and the rest of the world, but we need evidence of exactly what the programme delivers. How many students from abroad come here and how many students from Scotland participate? I am happy to look at the findings that Jackie Baillie has.

I hope that Scottish Enterprise or, perhaps, Skills Development Scotland will find the extra money. We should be looking at that, although I would want to see the evidence first to ensure that we are getting value for money from Scottish Enterprise. I was shocked by the figures that Jackie Baillie gave for bonuses and salaries. Perhaps we could save some money on them in order to continue the programme.

I congratulate Jackie Baillie on the motion. The debate opens up a whole new realm of how to look at education. I did not know about the EDGE programme, but I have been happy to learn as I have gone along, and I look forward to reading

Jackie Baillie's contribution and the investigation into the outcomes of the programme.

17:31

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I join in congratulating Jackie Baillie on bringing this important debate.

I will pass a few moments on Jackson Carlaw's contribution, who I think failed to rise to the occasion this evening. It is somewhat ironic to blame the Labour Government and Chancellor of the Exchequer for a global recession that originated in the sub-prime markets of the US as debt was packaged, given triple-A status and sold round the world, and in the aggressive banking strategy here in Scotland, such as with the takeover of ABN AMRO by RBS. Also, the last time I checked, Gordon Brown was not the Prime Minister of Spain, Portugal, Greece, the US, Japan or any other nation that is suffering similarly in what is an international economic crisis. That said, I will move to a more positive environment to discuss this important issue.

Schumpeter, who will be known to many for his writing on economics, said that entrepreneurship is a human creative act. That is certainly what the EDGE programme is about. He also said that entrepreneurship is about vision, passion, commitment and motivation; again, EDGE builds that in our young people and translates it into our business community.

I will share also what Willie Coffey had to say. The traditional approach to recessions in years gone by was for the Government to try to prop up old industries rather than to look forward. The EDGE programme does exactly the opposite—it looks forward. It ensures that Government does not look to short-term fixes but tries to build indigenous economic growth and skills in entrepreneurship and innovation.

For an agency that was designed to grow the economy to cut back on innovation spending shows a complete misunderstanding of the economic situation. Scottish Enterprise should really look in the mirror and check that it has its facts right. Innovation spending is not a luxury, but is essential in the teeth of a recession and in recovery from it. Like Claire Baker, I believe that there are issues with the management of that organisation—it really needs to understand what the economy and economics are about.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development will tell us that it is the role and duty of Governments and their agencies to build innovation systems. The flows of technology and information between people, enterprises and institutions are key to the innovation process. Here we have a programme that does that, but it is

being cut. We recognised throughout our time in government in Scotland that there are low levels of innovation and working among local firms and between local firms and our universities—that has been reflected in recent Scottish Government reports. EDGE seeks to improve that, which shows again the irony of the decision that has been taken.

I want to move from that macroeconomic perspective to a more focused discussion of the EDGE programme. I had the privilege of meeting Chris and Jimmie Pratt when I was part of the tartan week delegation many years ago. I made a commitment to them to participate in the predecessor to the EDGE programme as we now know it, and when I did I saw young Scots engaging with business and with American and other international students. I saw their confidence growing from day 1 through to day 5 of the programme and I saw the delivery and abilities of young Scots grow throughout the week as they learned from one another. It was great to see what we could call the normal Scot change into someone who was filled with confidence and pride in the work that they were doing, and the benefit from that.

I worry about the language that Willie Coffey used about reconfiguration of the programme. We do not want to do so much in terms of cost reduction that the programme cannot achieve its overall objective, which Schumpeter reminds us is about vision, passion and commitment.

I had the privilege of reading Mr Pratt's latest e-mail, which says:

"In the final analysis, it's too late now for EDGE 2010 and only the SNP: Scottish National Party can instruct Scottish Enterprise to reverse their decision and fund EDGE 2011. Successful programmes deserve true enthusiastic support from the Scottish Government. Not created by us is not a responsible reason to eliminate the program."

I hope that the minister can respond positively to Mr Pratt's request.

17:35

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Keith Brown): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on securing this debate.

The Government has always been a strong supporter of enterprise education and, within that context, entrepreneurial learning. We recognise that there is a strong economic need to help our young people to develop entrepreneurial attitudes. Exposing young people to the excitement of setting up and running their own business is key to our future economic success, and the contribution that programmes such as EDGE make is even more important during a recession.

However, it is also important to note that the EDGE programme is one of many that are designed to inspire and motivate young people to think about self employment and entrepreneurship as a viable career option. The current postponement—and it is a postponement, not, as the motion says, a cancellation—of the programme will not inhibit the significant range of other support that is provided by the Government and its agencies to promote entrepreneurship in our school pupils and university students.

In answer to the point that Willie Coffey raised, I should say that my understanding is that Scottish Enterprise is currently discussing changes to the EDGE programme with Scottish Government officials, Scottish universities and Skills Development Scotland. We will continue to work with and support Scottish Enterprise and its partners in developing a new delivery model for the EDGE programme.

As I made clear earlier, Scottish Enterprise has postponed the proposed delivery of EDGE in 2010 rather than cancelling the scheme and is working with partners to identify an improved model that will put the programme on a better long-term footing and ensure that it provides even greater value for money, which is something that every student of business will appreciate the need for.

The Scottish Government is not involved routinely in decisions that are connected to the delivery of specific Scottish Enterprise interventions. Those decisions are matters for the agency to make, taking account of value and the impact of its spend.

We are just coming out of a recession. The nightmare of the recession might be coming to an end, but the nightmare of the constraints on public finances is only just beginning. That is the environment in which we have to live.

The EDGE programme is one of many that are designed to inspire and motivate young people to think about self employment as a viable career option. The postponement of EDGE will not inhibit the significant range of other support that I mentioned. One element of that support is the Government's determined to succeed strategy for enterprise education for ages three to 18, which has entrepreneurial learning as one of its four key strands. That is part of our commitment to ensure that young people have access to information about all aspects of entrepreneurial learning: private, social and cooperative. We also have a range of resources for teachers, including online resources and a continuous professional development package that is accessible through the enterprise in education website that is located within Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Sandra White is right to point out that many of the figures concern projected or anticipated outcomes. We expect Scottish Enterprise to be able to give us a more up-to-date evaluation, which is essential to its decision about how to take forward the programme. We look forward to getting that, and I am happy to ensure that Sandra White and anyone else who is interested can see it as soon as it is available.

The work has been supported by our entrepreneurial focus group, which is made up of representatives from determined to succeed, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Social Enterprise Academy, the Co-operative Education Trust Scotland, the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust, the British Franchise Association in Scotland and Young Enterprise Scotland.

The group supported a national event on 11 May at the Glasgow Science Centre, at which all 32 local authorities had the opportunity to meet organisations such as the business gateway and Shell LiveWIRE who can help support them in the delivery of entrepreneurial learning.

We might not always appreciate this, but Scotland is seen as a world leader in enterprise in education and entrepreneurial learning. Last November, determined to succeed hosted a three-day international conference highlighting enterprise in education and entrepreneurial learning in our school system to delegates from countries such as the United States, Denmark, Spain, Holland and Estonia.

It is important to mention curriculum for excellence, which is allowing all our pupils to enjoy entrepreneurial and enterprising education that better prepares them for life and work. We are mainstreaming enterprise in education in a way that has not yet happened in many other countries. Work with employers is a core element of determined to succeed and will be incorporated into curriculum for excellence as we go forward.

Enterprising approaches to teaching and learning sit at the heart of the curriculum for excellence, which enables all our young people to develop the skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work that they need to be successful.

I could mention many other programmes, such as the Deloitte employability initiative, which we are working with through Scotland's Colleges. I am happy to provide more information on that.

In conclusion, I do not think that anybody can be in any doubt about the Government's commitment to and investment in school pupils and students alike; indeed, we have a worldwide reputation as leaders in enterprising and entrepreneurial learning, as demonstrated by the response to our determined to succeed excellence through

enterprise international conference, which was held last November.

Through determined to succeed and the curriculum for excellence, we have put enterprise in education and entrepreneurial learning at the heart of our education system.

We agree that EDGE supports our aims to develop a can-do, will-do attitude in our young people. It is important to note that, as I said, the programme is being not cancelled but postponed as Scottish Enterprise reviews the model and takes positive steps to realign the programme to ensure that it meets the needs of our young people and the businesses that support it.

As Sandra White said, by taking into account the needs of all EDGE partners, Scottish Enterprise hopes to provide an alternative delivery model, which will deliver benefits to all those involved.

Scottish Enterprise is best placed to make the important decision about the future of the EDGE programme. However, there should be no doubt that giving our young people opportunities for entrepreneurial learning in the global economy is extremely important to us all. Working with our partners, we hope to create an environment that excites young people, engages them in entrepreneurial learning and helps them to develop those attitudes in whatever career they choose to follow. We need to develop young people with skills and ambitions for Scotland to achieve our key aim of sustainable economic growth, and we will continue to work with our schools, colleges and universities to ensure that that happens.

Meeting closed at 17:41.

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