



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 10 June 2010

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 10 June 2010

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

Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6511, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill.

09:15

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I begin by thanking the Health and Sport Committee and its clerking team for their work in preparing the stage 1 report on the bill.

Over the past year or so, all of us inside and outside Parliament have moved a long way in our understanding of the sheer scale of the alcohol challenge that we face. There is now a much greater understanding that overconsumption of alcohol affects every age group, every socioeconomic group and every community. Alcohol misuse creates massive pressures on our national health service, our police service and our local authorities—it costs us more than £3.5 billion every year, which represents almost £900 for every adult in the country.

We also pay a heavy human price. Our rate of chronic liver disease has trebled, alcohol death rates have doubled and one in every 20 deaths is attributable to alcohol. The chief constable of Strathclyde Police said on Tuesday that in the past 10 weeks alone, alcohol—often cheap alcohol that has been consumed at home—has been a major factor in 14 murders in Strathclyde. Uncomfortable though it is to admit it, there is a particularly Scottish element to the problem. Sales figures suggest that we drink 25 per cent more than people in other parts of the United Kingdom. My view is simple: the time for talking is over and it is now time for action.

There is much common ground on the way forward. We all accept that a comprehensive approach is needed, and we have set that out in the alcohol framework. We all agree that effective enforcement of existing laws must be part of the solution. We all agree, too, that education, partnership working with the alcohol industry and investment in alcohol treatment services are all components of an effective alcohol strategy, which is why they are among the 41 actions in our alcohol framework.

However, we believe—this view is strongly backed by doctors, nurses, the police, the churches, public health experts, all four UK chief medical officers and a host of children's charities—that no package of measures will be truly effective without real and effective action on price. We believe that it would be a dereliction of our duty to ignore the clear evidence and expert opinion from the World Health Organization, advisers to the European Commission, the British Medical Association and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, which tell us very clearly that price intervention is one of the most effective tools in tackling alcohol misuse.

Our proposal for minimum pricing is based on that evidence, and I welcome the fact that the committee reflects that evidence in its report. However, in spite of the evidence, and in spite of the growing support for minimum pricing outside Parliament, many members in Parliament remain doggedly opposed to it. Therefore, I want to take head-on some of the key arguments against minimum pricing that we will hear today.

The first of those arguments is that minimum pricing would hit disproportionately people who drink responsibly or people on low incomes. That argument is not borne out by the research that we have, which shows that minimum pricing is a targeted rather than a blanket policy. The University of Sheffield study is quite clear that the financial cost of minimum pricing to responsible drinkers, because they drink relatively little, would be about £10 a year. Data show that 80 per cent of people in the lowest income group do not drink, or drink moderately, so they would not be affected at all or would be affected only marginally by minimum pricing. We also have research that shows that middle and higher-income groups, not low-income groups, are the main purchasers of alcohol that is priced between 30p and 50p per unit.

The biggest problem with the low-income argument is not that it is wrong but that it ignores the fact that people on low incomes are disproportionately affected—not by minimum pricing, but by the harm that is caused by alcohol, as a result of which they are five and a half times more likely to be admitted to hospital and 13 and a half times more likely to die. Therefore, the real disservice to people on low incomes would not be to introduce minimum pricing; it would be to fail to take effective action.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary accept that because of a lack of the required data and sample sizes that were too small to allow a conclusion to be reached, the Sheffield study did no modelling on the income groups to which she refers?

Nicola Sturgeon: As a member of the Health and Sport Committee, Helen Eadie knows the reasons for the limitations on the Sheffield study in that regard, but since the publication of the Sheffield study, two pieces of research have been submitted to the committee that bear out the facts that I have just given to Parliament.

The second key argument against minimum pricing is that it would be illegal. In that regard, I warmly welcome the committee's recognition that minimum pricing is capable of complying with European law. Of course, the committee rightly notes that the key to determining the specific effects of minimum pricing will be the price that is set. The committee has recommended that we lodge an amendment at stage 2 to propose a specific minimum price. I have said previously that we will suggest a price before a final vote is taken on the bill. Members will appreciate the importance of the price being set at the right level. That means that we must go through a careful process in order to arrive at a specific price to recommend to Parliament. Nevertheless, the committee has made a clear recommendation, which I am happy to reflect further on between now and stage 2, and I will endeavour to comply fully with it.

The third key argument against minimum pricing is that it has not been tried, so we do not know for sure that it works.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Not just now.

The critics say that the modelling that the University of Sheffield carried out, which suggests that minimum pricing would have significant health, crime and economic benefits, is not the same as real evidence. That is true, but in policy development around the world, such robust and detailed modelling is used for new policies that have not been tried. The national minimum wage is a good example of such a policy. The key message to the people who call for real evidence is this: let us introduce the policy and monitor and evaluate it, then we will have the evidence that people say is lacking. That is the responsible way forward. To ignore the weight of expert opinion that we now have is not responsible, and to do so on what appear to me to be party-political grounds is to play politics with public health, which is simply wrong.

The fourth key argument against the policy is that there are better ways of achieving the same aim. I am sure that colleagues will highlight the approach that the UK Government has mooted, in particular its advocacy of measures on alcohol duty and the proposal to ban below-cost sales. If the UK Government is serious about overhauling

the alcohol duty arrangements, that is welcome because it is nonsense that alcohol that is sold as whisky is taxed unfairly in comparison with alcohol that is sold as beer or wine. The reality is that tax increases are often not effective public health interventions because they do not always get passed on to consumers. The fact that the UK Government is considering a ban on below-cost selling—although only for England and Wales, according to the Number10.gov.uk website—suggests that it agrees with us on that.

However, a ban on below-cost selling is not a realistic alternative to the proposals in the bill, which is why we ruled it out. It may sound tough, but all that it would do is create for each product a minimum price at such a low level that it would have no effect on consumption and harm. Moreover, it would hit small businesses hard because below cost for a local store is very different to below cost for a major supermarket. In addition, it raises massive issues around enforceability and administration. We welcome the UK Government's stated intentions and the progress that it is making on the issue, but we believe that a ban on below-cost selling is not an effective way to tackle alcohol misuse, whereas minimum pricing is, which is why we have proposed it in the bill.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given everything that the cabinet secretary has said about the lack of political support for minimum pricing, and given that we know that the UK Government is determined to take forward proposals on taxation and a ban on below-cost selling, would not it be sensible for the Scottish Government to pause, wait and see what the UK Government does and work in conjunction with colleagues south of the border, rather than run down the road of minimum pricing, for which it does not have support?

Nicola Sturgeon: I say in all seriousness to Murdo Fraser that I will work as constructively as possible with the UK Government to find consensus on how to tackle alcohol misuse. However, I will not pause with a policy that I believe will be effective in tackling alcohol misuse in favour of one that I believe will not be. My responsibility is to take action that will make a difference.

With regard to other aspects of the bill, we welcome the committee's support for the proposals on quantity discounts and, as it has suggested, we are having further discussions with the Scottish Grocers Federation about the practical issues that have been raised. We also welcome the committee's agreement to make age verification policies such as challenge 21 and challenge 25 mandatory. We are keen to avoid any unnecessary bureaucracy for businesses that

already operate good schemes, but we will certainly reflect further on the view that the minimum age should be 25 rather than 21.

We were disappointed that the committee did not agree with the proposal to enable licensing boards to increase the off-sales purchase age in their area. Although it did not major on that part of the bill in its oral evidence-taking sessions, it has nevertheless made a clear recommendation and we will reflect on it.

We welcome the committee's views on the social responsibility levy and were particularly interested in its suggestion that the levy apply across the board with incentives for reaching high standards of responsible retailing. We will take that forward with stakeholders later this month and are happy to reflect on the committee's recommendation with a view to setting out in the bill more detail on the levy's principles and purpose. It has also been pointed out that a social responsibility levy could be used to deal with the increased revenues to, for example, supermarkets that would result from minimum pricing.

At the very start of this process, I made it clear that we do not claim to have all the answers. I made a genuine offer to the other parties that we would consider any suggestions that they wanted to make: that offer still stands. Various suggestions have been made, including tougher restrictions on promotions, limits on caffeine, further legislation on overprovision of licensed premises and a "two strikes and you're out" policy for underage sales. This Government will consider amendments on a case-by-case basis, and on each and every issue we will put public health before party politics.

As the total amount of alcohol that is consumed by a population determines the level of problems that it suffers, we need to reduce consumption. If we focus only on young people or on antisocial behaviour, we will miss the harm that is caused—often to themselves—by people regularly exceeding weekly limits in their homes. If we focus only on the most harmful drinkers, we will miss those who are on the verge of becoming harmful drinkers. This bill is not going to stop people drinking—that is not its aim—but it will help to reduce consumption and the harm that goes with it.

Scotland has a proud record of innovation in public health. We should not be afraid to try new approaches and we should not let claims about unintended consequences cloud our judgement. Every policy has secondary effects of one sort or another: if we let such concerns blur the big picture, we will never do or achieve anything.

Our relationship with alcohol impacts on everyone in some way, even those who drink

moderately or not at all. That is why we are asking Parliament to support the general principles of a bill that is based on sound evidence, peer-reviewed modelling and robust research, and will help to reduce consumption and harm.

I think that there is a mood swing in Scotland towards change. Our relationship with alcohol is no longer something that can be dismissed as being part of our culture, nor can it be tackled solely through education. Our culture is not somehow separate from cheap alcohol—we have become used to it and cheap alcohol is now part of the culture. It will be extremely difficult to change that culture without tackling low prices and irresponsible promotions.

We must be innovative, show leadership and rise above party politics to deliver a bill that is rightly ambitious for Scotland and which I believe is clearly in the national interest.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill.

09:28

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

The Scottish Conservatives agree that Scotland has a growing problem with alcohol abuse and that action is needed to tackle it. Although we may disagree with some of the measures that it has proposed, we commend the Scottish Government for taking the issue seriously and for at least attempting to take action to try and address it. Some of what is in the bill we can support, some of it we are sceptical about and some of it we must oppose. In the time that is available, I will try to set out our position and explain the rationale behind my amendment.

I should say at the outset that it must be a source of real regret that we as a Parliament have not been able to find a set of proposals about which we can all agree. I believe that everyone here understands that alcohol is a problem in our society, that Government action is required and that there is a link of some sort between price and consumption. However, we have been unable to agree on the Scottish National Party Government's plans for minimum pricing and I am truly sorry that the SNP's obsession with this one element has allowed it to dominate the debate and has prevented us from moving on to discuss other areas where there might be consensus on what can be done.

In the past, we in the Scottish Conservatives have set out our beliefs that minimum pricing would penalise responsible drinkers, that it is of dubious legality and that it would do serious damage to the vital Scotch whisky industry and Scotland's economic interests. Our position in that

respect has not changed, but there is now another important and relevant factor, which is the signalled intent of the coalition Government at Westminster to increase alcohol taxation and pricing to ensure that it tackles binge drinking without unfairly penalising responsible drinkers and important local industries. Coupled with that is an intent to legislate to prohibit sales of alcohol below cost price.

Nicola Sturgeon: Can Murdo Fraser tell us by how much a ban on selling below duty and VAT would increase the price of the problem drinks such as cheap cider that are causing such havoc in our communities?

Murdo Fraser: If the cabinet secretary is patient and waits for the budget that is due in a couple of weeks, she will soon learn by how much the duty on such problem drinks will increase. As I said, that is the UK Government's signalled intent, which is precisely why I have called on the cabinet secretary to be patient. If she is prepared to wait a couple of weeks instead of rushing headlong into progressing the bill, she might well see concrete proposals with which she should be working. In any case, all of that means that minimum pricing as a policy has been overtaken by events; it is yesterday's solution, so the sensible move would be for the Scottish Government to put its plans on hold and to engage with the UK Government on a shared way forward.

Notwithstanding all that has been claimed on the issue by the Scottish Government, the fact remains that there is no evidence base to support the introduction of minimum pricing. All that we have is the now widely discredited University of Sheffield study that the Health and Sport Committee analysed in detail. That study did not amount to evidence; it was simply modelling using available data. Indeed, Dr Petra Meier, the principal investigator, admitted to the committee that modelling was "like the weather forecast". I am sure that all of us who are old enough to remember Michael Fish on the BBC all those years ago confidently telling us that there would no hurricane will have regarded Dr Meier's claim with wry amusement.

Serious public policy proposals require a more secure evidence base than the one that is provided by the Sheffield study. Moreover, in its devastating critique of the Sheffield report, the Scotch Whisky Association identified a number of key failures, not least the fact that although alcohol consumption over the past five years has either been stable or decreasing, there has in that period been an increase in alcohol deaths and alcohol-related hospital discharges. That disproves the central contention in the Sheffield report that there is a clear link between price, consumption and harm. There are many other weaknesses in the

Sheffield report. Time does not permit me to list them all but it is clear, as our amendment says, that the evidence to support minimum pricing is simply not there.

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I am very confused by what Murdo Fraser is saying. At the beginning of your speech, you said that everyone accepts that there is a link between price and consumption; however, you seem to have just completely undermined that argument. Do you or do you not believe that there is a link between price and consumption?

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that they should always speak through the chair.

Murdo Fraser: I accept that there is some link between price and consumption. However, I do not accept that the modelling in the Sheffield university study is entirely accurate or is based on evidence. Indeed, Nicola Sturgeon earlier conceded that the evidence base is not there, and I think that that is a very important element in this debate.

The committee looked at a range of other issues around minimum pricing. It was highly sceptical, for example, about whether minimum pricing could not be got around by cross-border or internet sales. More and more people are buying their alcohol over the internet: that trend would be likely to accelerate if minimum pricing were introduced. If I buy my wine from Laithwaites or Tesco and I can save money by having it delivered to my door from a base in Carlisle or Berwick, that is what I will do. There will be thousands like me.

As for the question of legality, the best that can be said is that the matter is still in doubt. Without knowing the price, it is impossible to say for sure whether minimum pricing would be legal. We are therefore being asked to take a leap of faith. The Government is asking us to support a policy when we do not know whether it would be legal and enforceable. That is highly unsatisfactory.

There is serious concern in the spirits industry about the economic impact of minimum pricing. The Scotch Whisky Association has argued that a minimum pricing policy could lead to international copycat practice whereby key export markets would be expected to follow a Scottish health-justified trade barrier precedent. Already, South Korea has tried to introduce a health tax on Scotch, and Thailand is trying to impose warning labels on whisky bottles. According to the SWA, minimum pricing could result in a loss of exports worth £600 million a year. The Scotch whisky industry has damned the policy of minimum pricing as being the most serious threat to its future competitiveness. Those warnings should not be dismissed lightly by the SNP Government, particularly at a time of recession.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Does Murdo Fraser agree that the reason why the South Korean tax attempt failed was because it was specific to imported whisky, whereas the Government's minimum unit pricing proposal will apply to all products, whether from overseas or this country, and can therefore be viewed in an entirely different light?

Murdo Fraser: With the greatest of respect to Dr McKee, if I were to take advice on such matters, I would listen to the experts in the field from the industry body, which is the Scotch Whisky Association. It represents the whisky producers and is concerned about the impact of the proposed policy. With respect, the Scotch Whisky Association, which has a huge legal team that spends its entire time legislating in countries around the world to protect the Scotch whisky brand, knows more about the situation than Dr McKee or the SNP Government, so we should respect its views.

Given all the problems with the minimum pricing policy, it must make more sense to go down the tried, tested and legal route of tackling the problem through taxation. As I stated earlier, we agree that action needs to be taken on the easy availability of cheap alcohol, which is why the coalition Government at Westminster has proposed to take action on alcohol prices by means of the tax and duty system, and to legislate on a ban on the sale of alcohol below cost price. Should the ban be introduced in only England and Wales, we would wish to see a similar measure in Scotland, which could be done by a legislative consent motion.

I turn briefly to other parts of the bill. We have some sympathy with the proposals to restrict promotional activity, but like the Scottish Grocers Federation, we wish to see more detail on those before we come to a final view. We support the introduction of legal-age verification at age 21 or, as Labour's commission suggested, at 25. In relation to the sale of alcohol to under 21s, the Scottish Parliament previously saw off an attempt by the SNP Government to introduce a blanket ban on such sales. It is regrettable that there has been an attempt to reintroduce the measure by the back door, giving local licensing boards discretion as to whether to implement the bans on a territorial basis. We believe that that would cause a confusing postcode lottery that might well lead to a displacement of drink-related problems among the 18 to 21 age group so, like the Health and Sport Committee, we oppose the proposal.

Finally, we cannot support the social responsibility levy as a blanket provision. We have sympathy for the polluter-pays principle, whereby those who are responsible for problems have to pay the cost of them, but what is proposed in the

bill is simply another form of taxation and that is inappropriate, particularly at a time of recession.

The Scottish Conservatives regard the bill as being flawed. For the reasons that I have set out, we cannot support minimum pricing. We see merit in some of the proposals, so we will not oppose the bill's passage to stage 2 where, if it survives, we will look to lodge amendments to strike out section 1 and some of the other provisions with which we have difficulty. As I said earlier, we would much prefer that the Scottish Government wait and see exactly what proposals on tax and duty will be introduced by the UK Government before it proceeds further with the bill. Above all, we believe minimum pricing to be a policy that will penalise responsible drinkers. It is of dubious legality and it will be highly damaging to the Scotch whisky industry. For those reasons, the proposed policy must be struck from the bill, and accordingly I have pleasure in moving the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S3M-6511.1, to insert at end:

"but, in so doing, believes that there is no evidence to support section 1, which would introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol, and accordingly calls on the Scottish Government to lodge and move an amendment at stage 2 to delete section 1."

09:39

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I make this speech purely in my capacity as convener of the Health and Sport Committee, and given the range of views on the Government's proposals, substantially but not exclusively on minimum pricing, I am equally constrained, substantially but not exclusively. It is a tough call because such constraints will make my speech quite dry, so I thank Murdo Fraser for lodging an amendment, which cuts my speech by four minutes.

The Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Parliament on 25 November 2009 and the committee held an eight-week call for written evidence. That resulted in the receipt of 185 written submissions. I thank our support staff—the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre—for providing us throughout the process with a rather too steady and frequent supply of written material, summaries and updates. The deputy convener, Ross Finnie, was in danger of invoking health and safety rules as he lugged the growing bundles into committee. I thank him especially for his advice and support on what was a difficult bill for committee members who, in the main, kept their humour and tempers. Only occasionally did I have to invoke the "headache coming on" alert.

We took oral evidence from 12 panels of witnesses over 14 weeks and we heard from 50 witnesses in total. We received 27 pieces of supplementary written evidence from those witnesses, along with a revised report from the University of Sheffield on minimum unit pricing based on updated Scottish statistics. Despite the fact that the minimum pricing issue attracted most of the media attention during the evidence taking and is controversial to this very day, there is much more to the bill. The committee was determined that all the proposed policies in the bill should be given due consideration in its scrutiny. As a result, the committee has spent a great deal of time considering written and oral evidence as part of its stage 1 consideration of the bill. I am told that it all took 29 hours and 56 minutes. I am obliged to the clerk for that information—it seemed much longer from the convener's chair.

The committee thanks all those who contributed to the stage 1 evidence, but I single out Petra Meier of Sheffield university for her detailed oral and supplementary written evidence; John Beard, chief executive of Whyte and Mackay Ltd for appearing before the committee twice to clarify—is that the word that I really want?—his views on the economic impact of minimum pricing; and the cabinet secretary and her officials, who also attended the committee twice to provide oral evidence as well to provide requested supplementary evidence at quite short notice to allow us to meet deadlines for consideration.

As part of our oral evidence sessions on the bill, the committee held a videoconference with two panels of witnesses in Ottawa and Toronto on the Canadian policy of social reference pricing for alcohol sales. We thank them for making the time to take part in the scrutiny process. They seemed a nice bunch.

Regrettably, our attempts to let Ian McKee and Helen Eadie journey to Canada, even by canoe, were thwarted by the Conveners Group, whose members are tough cookies when allocating funding to committees. I never want to go therapy shopping with them. However, they allowed four committee members to undertake a fact-finding visit to Helsinki, which is beautiful in ice and snow with a temperature of -23°, and Paris—forever charming—in January 2010. Not to digress into a travelogue, the focus of the visits was to examine public health policy in those countries. Finland is a country that is comparable with Scotland that has experimented with alcohol pricing via taxation. In France, rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related disease had dropped progressively and significantly, although admittedly from a high, for reasons other than tax and other retail controls.

The committee spent five weeks considering thereafter all the written and oral evidence and

drafting its stage 1 report on the bill, which was published on 27 May. That was another hard grind that ended with our amending the report as we scrutinised changes on an overhead screen to cries from the exhausted chair of “Paragraph signed off; no going back”.

I stress that despite our many differences—again, I thank the clerks for diplomatic drafting assistance—the committee was unanimous in its recognition of the serious public health problems that are faced by Scotland because of its unhealthy relationship with alcohol, and of the genuine attempts of the Government, other political parties and stakeholders to address the issue.

As in much of the written and oral evidence that was received by the committee, members had a range of views on the potential benefit of introducing minimum unit pricing and how it might affect the level of alcohol consumption in Scotland. However, we agreed that a full debate on all the potential benefits of minimum unit pricing as well as on the legality in European Union law of the policy will not be sustainable in the absence of knowing the actual minimum unit price.

The committee was also of the view that a much more detailed debate is required between the Scottish Government and key stakeholders on the operation and impact of the proposed social responsibility levy. There was considerable consensus that the levy might be, as my history teacher used to drum into us, “a good thing”.

The committee acknowledges the desire of the Government to allow itself maximum flexibility in defining the details of policy areas such as minimum unit pricing and a social responsibility levy, by using subordinate legislation under the bill. However, on policy areas of such importance and widespread debate, the committee believed that Parliament must have the opportunity to scrutinise the key provisions fully, in the form of proposed primary legislation. In plain speak, that means “on the face of the bill”. The measures should indeed be put on the face of the bill at stage 2, so that further evidence can be taken, if necessary, prior to consideration of the amendments. I note what the cabinet secretary has said in that regard.

The committee was not wholly persuaded by the argument that licensing boards should be granted the power to raise the age of purchase for off-sales alcohol from 18 to 21. However, members fully support the proposal to bring the regime for off-sales alcohol discounts and promotions into line with those that currently exist for the on-sales trade. Concerns were expressed by some committee members, however, about the possible unintended consequences that might result from that change, including potential increases in

revenues to the drinks industry. The committee considers that those concerns must be addressed by the Government.

The committee looks forward to hearing from the cabinet secretary about whether the Government will accept the committee's recommendations. The cabinet secretary has already indicated that to some extent. Should the bill proceed to stage 2, we look forward to considering amendments to address the range of issues that are highlighted in our report.

I again thank our robust clerks and committee members. I ask Helen Eadie, who has offered me first aid before, to have the paracetamol ready for stage 2.

09:47

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife (Lab): All of us in the chamber seek to reverse the 30 years of rising general alcohol consumption and increasing levels of hazardous drinking and harm. We should recognise, however, that 70 per cent of the population use alcohol responsibly. Unlike tobacco, there are health benefits from alcohol taken in moderation. We should not support policies that, although they might—I stress might—tackle the 7 per cent of harmful drinkers in our communities, would have a disproportionate effect on the 70 per cent and would not tackle the underlying culture.

The other problems that we all agree need to be tackled—this was reinforced by Chief Constable Stephen House—include those of young binge drinkers causing mayhem in the night economy and alcohol-fuelled crime. We must also tackle underage drinking, the majority of which is parent sanctioned. We do not have a robust test-purchasing programme, those who sell illegally are given derisory fines, and the SNP Government has not even felt it important enough to collect the data on suspensions for 2008-09, which is regrettable.

Most of all, the issue concerns the culture. Just as we successfully changed the culture on tobacco and on drink driving, so we have to change the culture on drinking. That could take a generation, but it is a task to which we must collectively apply ourselves.

There are many measures in the bill that we can support, but we need to pay heed to the evidence from the Law Society of Scotland, not least on the Labour-Liberal Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005, which contained a power unique in the world, on taking into account the public health interest and the protection of children. The 2005 act has yet to achieve its full potential in tackling availability, which is one of the three main drivers for potential change; the other two are price and culture. I

accept the cabinet secretary's arguments about price per se, although there is constant confusion between price and minimum unit pricing.

The SNP's other proposal is mainly concerned with discounts and promotions. Labour supports such measures, although we hope to strengthen the provisions at stage 2. As the World Health Organization has stated, alcohol should be treated like no other commodity. A significant reduction in discounts and promotions could reduce consumption by about 3.1 per cent if the level were 40p, which is significant.

We do not accept the arguments of experts in the industry regarding the effects on the industry overseas. That is the basis of the Conservative amendment, and we do not accept it.

We believe that minimum unit pricing fails on many counts. For all the vocal support from health professionals in particular, the issue comes down to one question: does the Parliament believe that a single, untried and untested econometric model provides a sound basis for the main instrument to solve Scotland's drinking problem? Although the model was peer reviewed, it was described to the Health and Sport Committee by its main author as "like the weather forecast". Images of Michael Fish or the forecast of barbecue weather last summer come to mind. Why did Dr Meier say that? Like any good academic, she was responding honestly to a question. The question was why, when real data are applied retrospectively to it, the model does not do what it says on the tin. That point is fundamental to one of our arguments.

The cabinet secretary and most of the SNP members who support the minimum unit pricing measures repeatedly talk about "overwhelming evidence". Frankly, that is dishonest. Only one piece of empirical evidence has been published on minimum unit pricing, and it is from an Aboriginal community that is not served by too many supermarkets. There is no other published evidence on it. What does exist is a single model, and that must be the basis of the debate. If it is not, the SNP is obsessing about the matter.

Nicola Sturgeon: Richard Simpson accepts the relationship between price and consumption.

Dr Simpson: Yes.

Nicola Sturgeon: He is saying that he does not think that minimum unit pricing is the way to tackle that relationship. Can he tell us today what he thinks is the best way to tackle it?

Dr Simpson: No, but what I will do is complete the arguments against minimum unit pricing.

On the basis of a single econometric study, Scotland is once again to be used as an experimental laboratory. The last time we were used for the testing of an economic theory was

when the poll tax was introduced. There is no evidence; there is just an untried and untested model. It is like weather forecasting. It is an experiment.

Who are the groups with the largest numbers of hazardous drinkers, by income? It is the richest half of the community. Which age group contains the largest number of hazardous drinkers? It is 18 to 24-year-olds. Who will be most responsive to the minimum unit price? It is not the harmful drinker, who, evidence shows, will substitute; it is not the richer half of the community, who can simply switch drinks and who will not be affected one jot even by a 60p minimum price; and it is not the young, heavier drinkers, whose consumption, according to Dr Petra Meier in her study, would be reduced by only 0.7 per cent. It will be the less well off in our community, as more of their spend is on cheap alcohol. The SNP failed to commission any research on low-income groups.

Minimum unit pricing fails on lack of evidence. It fails on its lack of effect when real data are applied to the model. It fails to tackle the richer, who consume far more. It fails to tackle the 18-to-24 age group, who have the greatest number of hazardous drinkers among them. It fails to tackle the night-economy drunkenness. It fails to tackle the culture of drinking. It fails to protect the poorest third from what could be punitive tax increases.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Dr Simpson: I do not have time.

If that is not enough, the SNP failed to commission any research on the market response to the £113 million annual revenue windfall. What will the market do?

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way on that point?

Dr Simpson: No.

The market will probably reduce to the minimum price the price of high-volume drinks that come just above it. The situation will not change. We still do not know what the SNP's minimum unit price is, so we cannot test its legality.

Godfrey Robson, the civil servant who wrote the first alcohol action plan, recently wrote that the unanswerable questions on minimum unit pricing are whether it will be decisive and whether it will be sustainable. The answer is no.

I quote what NICE has said on the matter, which Murdo Fraser referred to:

"As would be expected, greater overall price increases lead to larger consumption reductions."

The NICE report continues:

"Policies targeting price changes specifically on low-priced products lead to smaller changes in consumption, as

they only cover a part of the market and induce substitution for other products by consumers."

That is from the NICE report that was published last week. MUP is not acceptable.

09:54

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): At a rather early stage in the morning, we are in danger of substituting volume for argument, which is slightly concerning.

I have some concerns about the bill and about the arguments that have just been adduced. I have heard clearly the view that the Sheffield report is effectively a load of rubbish. That view was expressed by those who might support a tax policy, which is not normally accompanied by evidence of its economic impact; of course, tax policies are not normally accompanied by evidence of their impact on drinking behaviour. I am, frankly, puzzled about which model might be used. If the evidence that came before the committee was clear about nothing else, it was clear about the prevalence of such modelling in determining courses of action in public health.

It is legitimate to point to areas of the study either where the conclusions require further reinforcement or where there are questions. However, I do not accept the argument that the modelling—in this case, the peer-review exercise was very complimentary about its potential use—should simply be dismissed. That invites the conclusion that we will never proceed because there will never be any way in which we can model or even suggest the effect of such a measure. We have moved into an area of debate in which we are in danger of setting precedents about the test that we might apply to public health policy.

Murdo Fraser said that he thinks that the SNP Government might be rushing into legislating in this area. There can be no question but that it has done that, and the Liberal Democrats are deeply concerned that, despite the length of time that it has taken, the bill's preparation leaves a lot to be concerned about. It must have been obvious to the Government that, when the Parliament stated that it wanted the proposed measure to be contained in a bill and not a statutory instrument under the 2005 act, the Parliament was expressing the view that all aspects of this most important policy proposal should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Therefore, it must also have been obvious to the Government that the Parliament would want to debate the price. The cabinet secretary keeps telling us that she wants to set the price on the basis of the latest and best possible evidence. I accept her view, but I think that, as a parliamentarian, I am entitled to exactly the same access to the latest and best possible evidence. I cannot for the life of me understand why the

Government has not understood the wish of Parliament in that regard.

Ian McKee: Would any minimum unit price that was set command Mr Finnie's support for the bill?

Ross Finnie: I will explain the relevance of the price as I develop my point. If we accept the various data on which the Sheffield model is constructed, even if we wish to probe and question certain of the conclusions that have been advanced from those, there is no doubt that the Sheffield model produces a range of potential health benefits. Two important matters arise from that.

First, if we are to assess properly the material or other health benefits that might accrue from minimum pricing, we need to know the price—I say to Dr McKee that that is the problem. I do not wholly accept Richard Simpson's argument that at no point in the model do we get to the point at which minimum pricing affects other people. Indeed, I have questions about the assertion that 70 per cent of people drink responsibly. If 70 per cent drink responsibly, a heck of a lot of people are developing sclerosis of the liver without drinking irresponsibly. That gives me real concerns about the statistics on the general population, which is one of the areas where weaknesses in the data begin to emerge. I do not find such an assertion robust.

The second issue is that of the proposal's legality. The Government must have known that Parliament would be concerned about that. Notwithstanding the proper certificate that the Presiding Officer gave to the bill, the Subordinate Legislation Committee revealed clearly that that was possible only because no price was mentioned. There is no question of members using the debate to challenge the Presiding Officer's authority, but it is a fact that the Government needs to specify the minimum unit price before we can properly assess the legality or illegality of the bill. The Sheffield study is pivotal, and I do not accept all the criticisms that Richard Simpson made of it. Nevertheless, the Government must have known that the Scottish Parliament inquiring into a Scottish measure would properly expect the bill to contain as many Scottish data as possible.

Although the committee did an incredible job it was seriously hampered for those reasons in testing witnesses on the best possible evidence, which is the purpose of committee scrutiny. As anyone who has read the committee's report can see, the committee was not satisfied that the case was made in a range of areas. Part of the problem—but not the whole problem—was the fact that some of the evidence did not enable the committee to arrive at a properly measured conclusion. I was one of those committee

members who was perfectly willing to say that the bill should proceed to stage 2, but I was also one of those who contributed to the voluminous criticism in the report, calling for further evidence to be taken at stage 2. Whatever the merits or otherwise of the proposed measure, it would be good to have that debate.

Regrettably, with the best intentions in the world, the Government has introduced a bill that has major aspects that were very difficult to test and scrutinise properly, with the consequence that the committee's conclusion does not give the bill the endorsement that the cabinet secretary might have hoped for. No parliamentarian doing their job could come to a simple conclusion on the basis of the evidence that was put to the committee. Nevertheless, although I believe that there was evidence, I think that to proceed in this way might set a dangerous precedent for the way in which we deal with other public health matters.

10:03

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): We have heard this morning about the extent of Scotland's problem in its relationship with alcohol. The evidence that the committee received clearly illustrated the deep-rooted and long-standing problem that Scotland has in that relationship, which is causing serious damage to individuals, families and communities throughout Scotland. The committee received evidence from children's organisations, churches, health professional groups, medical professional groups, poverty groups, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and students organisations. As a member of the committee, I thank those organisations for the time that they took to submit their evidence to us, the range of which demonstrates the extent to which the issue affects our society.

The committee's stage 1 report makes it clear that, despite the measures that have been taken by present and previous Governments to tackle Scotland's relationship with alcohol, more needs to be done. If we are to achieve real change in the area, we must implement radical measures that will start to change Scotland's relationship with alcohol. I believe that, collectively, the measures that are proposed in the bill will achieve that.

Much of today's debate has focused on minimum pricing, which was also the case during consideration of the bill in committee. A series of arguments, many of them legitimate, have been made against minimum pricing. The main one, which was made at the outset, concerned the legality of minimum pricing. The main proponent of that argument was the Scotch Whisky Association. However, it is clear from the evidence that the SWA submitted to the Health and Sport Committee that a lot of the detail is fairly

speculative in nature. The degree of certainty that the SWA tried to present to the committee in its argument demonstrates that it is simply trying to talk up the issue of illegality despite the fragile legal basis for its proposition. The more measured evidence from the Law Society of Scotland demonstrated that there is the potential to ensure that minimum pricing is capable of complying with EU law. It is not acceptable for those who oppose minimum pricing to shout as loudly as possible that it may be or is illegal, despite the limited legal basis for that argument.

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): Does Michael Matheson accept that it is astonishing that, as we come to the stage 1 debate, the issue of legality is still not determined because the Government has not specified the price? Is that not an important consideration that needs to be dealt with?

Michael Matheson: Robert Brown makes a fundamental mistake: even if the minimum price was announced today or last month, that would not stop those who argue that minimum pricing is illegal. Any provision of this nature could be challenged in the European courts. Overcoming the issue of legality is not dependent purely on the announcement of the minimum price.

I turn to another argument against minimum pricing, which is the impact that it would have on low-income families. Again, that was a legitimate concern raised by committee members and by other members today. However, when we hear politicians arguing that the policy will have a serious impact on people from low-income families, I would expect the same argument to be made by those who work with children from low-income families and with families who are on or below the poverty line. It is interesting that the evidence that the committee received from such organisations does not make that argument. In fact, they say that they support minimum pricing. They raise concerns that the policy could have an impact on low-income families, but they ask us to monitor the impact of the policy once it is introduced.

Helen Eadie: Does Michael Matheson acknowledge that Tom Roberts at Children 1st stated clearly that there was not an exact link between price and consumption? There are many other such references throughout our report.

Michael Matheson: I am not entirely sure how relevant that is to the issue. As the member will be aware, Children 1st, Barnardo's Scotland and other organisations support minimum pricing as a way of trying to deal with the serious damage experienced by low-income families as a result of overconsumption of cheap alcohol. The member raises another argument that has been created for political reasons, without any evidence to support it.

Another main concern is over the potential for minimum pricing to put more money into the retailers' pockets. Again, that is a legitimate concern. However, we must consider the evidence that the committee received on the issue. Increased income for retailers in this regard is driven by two things: one is to do with minimum pricing, and the other is to do with the ban on discounting. What I find interesting is that those who argue against minimum pricing on the basis that it will increase retailers' profits are perfectly happy to support the ban on discounting, despite the fact that it will also increase retailers' profits. That position is completely hypocritical, yet it was adopted by Richard Simpson today.

I welcome the fact that people on all sides of the debate recognise that price and availability are important drivers in the consumption of alcohol. However, it is staggering that those who oppose minimum pricing as a serious attempt to tackle the problem in Scotland have not come up with one alternative measure to ensure that we get on top of the issue.

10:10

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate the Health and Sport Committee on its scrutiny of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, and Christine Grahame on the restraint and humour in her speech as convener.

The report reflects the fact that while there is not consensus on every policy, the committee has diligently carried out its duty to scrutinise the legislation and its evidence base. It also makes it clear that all parties are troubled by the extent of alcohol misuse in Scotland and want effective action to tackle our heavy drinking culture. Obviously, that is important from a health perspective; however, it is also crucial from a law-and-order perspective. That was reflected in Chief Constable Stephen House's comments—which the cabinet secretary referred to—when earlier in the week he spoke of the number of assaults and murders in recent months that have been linked to alcohol misuse. Although it is right that he should highlight that link, we cannot get away from the fact that the coverage of those incidents in *The Herald* showed the prevalence of the use of knives in those offences. That is a matter to which we will return in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill.

To address the relationship between alcohol misuse and crime, we have called for the use of alcohol treatment and testing orders for offenders whose drink problem has contributed to their crimes. That has also led us to seek action on caffeinated alcohol; indeed, the article in *The Herald* referred to a Buckfast bottle being used in an assault on a young man by his brother. We

believe that the amount of caffeine in alcoholic products should be limited. We have talked time and again about evidence, and on that issue, the evidence is clear. In January, Strathclyde Police told the BBC that between 2006 and 2009 Buckfast was mentioned in 5,638 crime reports in the region, equating to three a day on average.

Shona Robison: Given the importance given to modelling and evidence by Richard Simpson, will the member tell us what level of reduction in harm has been measured in relation to the proposal on caffeine? What impact, in measurement and modelling terms, would that policy have?

Richard Baker: The minister should look not only to evidence from here—from Glasgow Caledonian University, for example—but to evidence from abroad. The evidence on caffeinated alcohol is far stronger than the evidence for a minimum unit price. I have more statistics that minister may wish to hear. One in 10 of the offences to which Strathclyde Police referred were violent. A bottle was used as a weapon 114 times in that period. Bottles are now the second most common weapon of attack. There is yet more evidence. The need for action is clear, and I hope that we can persuade others to support us on the issue.

I have never supported the proposal that the bill should include raising to 21 the age at which one can purchase alcohol in off-licences, but I very much welcome the proposal for a mandatory age verification scheme. For the past two years, we have supported a mandatory challenge 25 scheme as an effective way of tackling underage drinking. However, in order to tackle underage drinking and excessive drinking in general, it is vital that the current licensing laws are properly enforced. The cabinet secretary referred to that, but there are concerns that still not enough is being done. For example, in the past two years, only one person has been successfully prosecuted for selling alcohol to someone who was already drunk, and only three people were proceeded against. That issue requires far more action from the Government, beyond the bill.

One of the concerns that we have raised about minimum pricing relates to the extent of the profits from which the drinks industry would benefit as a result of its introduction. We prefer measures that could result in funds being retained for investment in important alcohol misuse services. Of course, that can be achieved through taxation, and the previous Labour UK Government increased duty on alcohol, and wished to do so on cider in particular.

A social responsibility levy offers a similar opportunity to ensure that those who profit from the sale of alcohol contribute to the provision of services and initiatives to deal with its misuse. I

welcome the fact that it has the potential to be something wider than simply a levy based on the polluter-pays principle—it is something in the bill that we can support. There is a range of measures on which there can be agreement, and I am sure that new, practical measures will be proposed through the alcohol commission that we have established, which will report back before stage 2.

We need a wide range of measures because there is no silver bullet that will tackle alcohol misuse; certainly, a minimum unit price is not a panacea. The SNP proposition is to establish a consensus on tackling alcohol misuse. However, consensus means that everyone has to agree—in this case, to support a minimum unit price for alcohol—and I do not believe that that is helping the debate, particularly given the clear problems with the minimum unit price proposal. The issue of cross-border alcohol sales was flagged up in the committee report: I refer not only to Carlisle as the new Calais but to internet sales, which the committee recognises are increasing greatly. I worry about the potential for minimum unit pricing to lead to greater illicit sales of alcohol, thereby contributing to criminal activity. The issue has not been considered properly thus far.

As the Law Society of Scotland pointed out in its evidence, there may be justification for the policy in terms of European law, but it requires to be tested. It is by no means evident that the policy will be successful. I am afraid that the cabinet secretary's failure to state what the minimum unit price will be not only weakens the general argument for it but raises the suspicion that there are deep concerns about its legality. I say that because the Scottish Government is unwilling to test the matter now.

It is quite wrong to suggest that those who are unwilling to support one proposal are not serious about tackling alcohol misuse. There are important matters on which we can agree and new proposals that we and others will bring forward that we hope will attract support. That is what we should reflect on today. What is not in question is that we have to change our country's damaging relationship with alcohol. I think that there is a determination across the chamber to find the most effective policies to do so. That is why we have come forward with our policy proposals not only to change laws but to take action that works.

10:16

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Like other members, I recognise the complexity of Scotland's relationship with alcohol. I also recognise that culture plays a major role and that no single measure is the answer to all problems. Beneficial change will not come about by legislation alone. What is required is a sea change in the way in

which everyone considers alcohol and the place that it has in society. That said, I believe that legislation has a role to play, within which the proposal for minimum unit pricing has an important place. Given that minimum unit pricing is one of the most controversial elements of the bill, I will devote the rest of my speech to it.

Let us consider some of the arguments that have been presented against minimum unit pricing. The first is that the proposal is not firmly evidence based. I refer to the widely respected modelling exercise that Dr Petra Meier of the University of Sheffield conducted. On reflection, Richard Simpson may come to regret some of his remarks on the subject. The exercise was simply a forecast using best evidence. Indeed, when, in her evidence to the committee, Dr Meier likened it to a weather forecast, one could hear the snorts of derision from opponents, which have been repeated today, yet the Government, like its predecessor, thinks so highly of weather forecasting that it gives the director of meteorology services a salary that is greater than that of the Prime Minister. No sensible sailor sets out without first checking the shipping forecast, likewise the sensible aircraft pilot without first checking the Met Office report. Forecasts have some value. The reason that there is no harder evidence is that no country has tried minimum unit pricing and rigorously assessed it. Why should we not be the first? If everyone waited until someone else had done something, nothing would ever be done. Given that we are world leaders in alcohol problems, why should we not be the country to lead the way on minimum unit pricing?

I turn to the effect of minimum unit pricing on poor families. The truth is that poor people are simply poor, not feckless or stupid. According to the Scottish Government's analytical services division, 23 per cent of people in the lowest income quintile buy no alcohol at all—they have better things on which to spend their limited resources. Of the rest, 57 per cent drink on average 4.9 units a week and so will be only marginally affected, and 20 per cent fall into the category of hazardous or harmful drinkers. The last group, which another report showed drink on average 198 units a week, would be heavily hit by minimum unit pricing, but they are the people who suffer hugely and excessively from the physical and psychiatric harm that is done by alcohol. Given that there is evidence that even that group is price responsive, the rise in the price of cheap alcohol that would be occasioned by minimum unit pricing would certainly save lives and prevent ill health.

The Opposition makes great play of the allegation that minimum unit pricing simply puts money into the pockets of supermarkets. We have heard that again today. There are two drawbacks

to the argument. First, as Michael Matheson pointed out, the banning of deep discounting, two-for-one offers and so forth also puts money into supermarket pockets, yet those measures seem to meet with approval from those who oppose minimum unit pricing on that very ground. That said, of much more importance is the question, why are most supermarkets firmly against minimum unit pricing? Is it, as Nick Grant of Sainsbury's told the committee, a matter of principle to refuse this largesse? I doubt it. I tend to believe the argument that people ranging from the owner of a small corner shop in my constituency to Mitchells and Butlers, which owns 2,000 pubs in the UK, have put forward—supermarkets use low-priced alcohol as a loss-leader to attract more customers who then buy their groceries from the same store. As well as fuelling our alcohol spree with cheap alcohol, the supermarkets threaten the viability of small shops and pubs in Scotland, where alcohol can be as much as seven times as expensive as it is in supermarkets.

Almost all the evidence that we hear against minimum unit pricing comes from the vested interests who produce or sell alcohol—those who would lose out if Scotland were to reduce its drinking habits. On the other hand, we hear a torrent of evidence in favour of minimum unit pricing from a vast array of impartial witnesses. I refer to all the directors of health of Scotland's terrestrial health boards, the chief medical officers of the four home countries, the British Medical Association, the medical royal colleges, the police, churches and organisations that care for those who are wrestling with alcohol—the list goes on and on, yet the Opposition opposes. The stance of Opposition members reminds me of the first world war Irving Berlin song in which a proud mother watching her son marching off to France with his battalion exclaims to her friends:

"They were all out of step but Jim".

I will conclude with two quotes from international public health consultant Dr Peter Anderson. The first is from a meeting in Edinburgh last year:

"Internationally, Scotland is seen as a public health leader. You had the courage to introduce smoke free pubs; let us hope that you have the same courage to introduce a minimum price for alcohol."

The second is from his submission to the Health and Sport Committee:

"If ... the Scottish Parliament does not introduce a minimum price, then it has to accept the consequences of its inaction: more Scottish deaths, more crime and more unemployment."

What we have to consider today is this: no one will die if minimum unit pricing is introduced, but people may well die if it is not. I strongly support minimum unit pricing in Scotland.

10:22

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am clear that Scotland has a problem with alcohol: we drink when we are happy, we drink when we are sad, we drink to celebrate and we drink to commiserate. Very little of what we do socially does not involve alcohol. This is a cultural issue; one that is catching on across the globe. The cost of alcohol abuse to the NHS in the Highlands and Islands is in the region of £12.3 million a year, which is massive, but the cost to families, particularly children, is immeasurable. Doing nothing is not an option. To the Government's credit, it introduced the bill in an attempt to tackle the issue. That said, what the bill proposes and what is missing from it need to be challenged. Some measures in the bill will work well, but others will not.

In its briefing, Children 1st said:

"Minimum pricing is not a 'silver bullet' but we support it because it will help to put an end to cheap alcohol."

Minimum pricing has gained such support because it is seen as the only option. That is not the case. It is our duty to ensure that the options that are put forward are workable and effective.

I was part of the Health and Sport Committee delegation to France and Finland, where we looked at policies and problems. In Finland, the price of alcohol is historically high due to taxation and the country always having a strong temperance movement. All off-licences are operated by Alko, the state-owned monopoly; supermarkets cannot sell alcohol apart from low-alcohol beer. That means that anyone who wants to buy alcohol has to go to Alko, where there are no special offers, no promotions and no enticements to drink more. When Estonia joined the EU, the Finnish Government recognised that Finland would be subject to cross-border trade and lowered taxation on alcohol to mitigate the effect. That led to a substantial increase in Finnish alcohol consumption, as a result of which the Government again increased taxation on alcohol over a number of years. It is clear that the falling price led to an increase in consumption. However, the rise in price did not lead to a fall in consumption.

In France, things are different. Historically, the French have had a very high alcohol consumption rate. Because of the strong wine industry lobby, it is almost impossible for the Government to raise taxes on wine, therefore it remains a low-cost product. However the Government has increased taxation on spirits, making them much more expensive. The overall rate of alcohol consumption in France has fallen, but that fall has masked a rise in spirit drinking—it is wine consumption that has fallen dramatically. Again,

rising prices appear to have had little or no impact on consumption.

In both countries, people pointed to a range of factors that had helped to decrease drinking. In France, it was believed that wine consumption had fallen due to drink driving laws. Wine had been the drink of choice of the older generation, who tended to live in rural areas. When drink driving laws were enforced, those who had to drive had to stop drinking. In Finland, there has been a drop in consumption in the 18-to-24 age group. No research has been carried out into the reasons for that; the only explanation that people could offer was Alko's advertising campaign, which focused on parents, encouraging them not to drink when their children were present and showing the impact on young people of their parents' drinking. In France, people believed that they were moving from a Mediterranean drinking culture to a more global drinking culture that had much more in common with the drinking culture of northern Europe and involved young people binge drinking on spirits.

The main policy direction of the bill is minimum unit pricing, but there is no empirical evidence that a price increase leads to a decrease in consumption. However, there is clear evidence that lowering price leads to increased consumption. The bill looks at promotions, but it is not clear that it goes far enough in that area. In effect, promotions lower price, and it has been shown that lower price increases consumption. The bill needs to be strengthened in that regard.

Minimum pricing will not have the effect that is sought. That is borne out by the experience of other countries. The only supporting evidence is the Sheffield report, which uses modelling rather than empirical evidence to show effect. Increasing price has not impacted anywhere else, and there is no evidence that Scotland will be different.

I will touch on the social responsibility levy. The committee attempted to take evidence on the policy, but that became impossible due to a lack of detail. It appeared to me that there were three policy choices: a polluter-pays levy, a blanket levy and a levy with incentives for good practice. Different sections of the community and industry believed that levies would work, but it was difficult to build a consensus, due to the lack of detail. In the written answer to a question from my colleague Richard Simpson, it emerged that the cabinet secretary had not met the industry since August 2009, which makes it difficult to work through the process and to get more detail on the policy.

The Government argued to the committee that the levy could help to recoup the largesse of the minimum pricing policy. However, it was not clear whether only off-licences would have to pay the

levy. It appeared that the on-trade, which would not benefit financially from minimum pricing, might also have to pay. Others argued that recent changes to the licensing laws had not been properly implemented and that proper implementation of those changes would negate the need for a social responsibility levy.

However, it was clear that the levy could provide finance to help local authorities to deal with the cost of problem drinking. Again, that issue needs further work. As I indicated, the cost of drinking to the NHS is massive. I ask the cabinet secretary to consider ways of ensuring that funding from the levy can be used to offset some of that cost. The cabinet secretary needs to return to the committee at stage 2 with a great deal more detail on the proposals, to enable the committee to scrutinise them effectively and to bring forward a policy that is fair and that works.

Regardless of whether it is or is not legal, minimum pricing will not tackle Scotland's problem with alcohol. The Government needs to bring forward robust measures to tackle the problem, or the opportunity that the bill presents will be missed.

10:28

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

We share all of the concerns that have been expressed about the high level of alcohol consumption in Scotland and our complex relationship with alcohol, to which other members have referred. I thank the Conveners Group for agreeing to fund the Health and Sport Committee's visit to Finland and France, which we found extremely helpful.

We have examined the evidence base for the relationship between the minimum price of alcohol and reductions in overall consumption, and we do not think that minimum pricing will be effective in achieving its goal. However, we support many other measures in the bill, which will be effective in reducing alcohol consumption.

The first and second versions of the Sheffield study on minimum pricing varied considerably: the new version predicted 35 per cent fewer deaths attributable to alcohol, 43 per cent fewer alcohol-related deaths in 10 years and 20 per cent fewer hospital admissions in year 1. Unfortunately, all of the discussion with witnesses at stage 1 and everything that is contained in the committee's stage 1 report was based on the previous Sheffield model, not the up-to-date, more accurate version, which contains Scottish rather than English data.

Also missing from the Sheffield study is the effect of cross-border trading, which we know can be significant. There is no mention of internet

sales, in spite of the fact that Asda reports for alcohol

"very high, double-digit, year-on-year growth in internet sales."—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 10 March 2010; c 2909.]

The Sheffield study contains no analysis of binge drinking, which is one of our biggest problems. As other members have said, there is no mention of the effect on low-income families. There is also no examination of the substitution effect—for example, some younger people might use illegal drugs instead of alcohol.

The model, which has been likened to the weather forecast, is based on an increase in price to the minimum price and an assumed fall in demand, but other ways of buying alcohol—over the internet and from across the border—will negate any such fall. When prices were raised in Finland, people continued to consume alcohol at the same level—they just bought more from Estonia. Professor Beath confirmed that, as the price falls, more will be consumed, but that, as the price rises, people will find ways of continuing to consume at the same level, at lower prices. The committee saw and heard that throughout its evidence.

Given that minimum pricing will lead to increased revenues and potential profits for producers and retailers, the higher income will allow them to reduce the price of more expensive alcohol products, in order to sell a greater volume of alcohol while maintaining revenues and profits. As was stated in evidence, minimum pricing could result in an increase in overall sales of alcohol, not a reduction.

The 2008 Scottish health survey was the basis for mark 2 of the Sheffield study. It confirms that weekly consumption for men and women has fallen significantly, yet there have been no corresponding reductions in health or justice harms, which the Sheffield study predicts for reduced alcohol consumption. The survey also states:

"Levels of consumption were highest among women in managerial and professional households, in the highest income quintile and among those living in the least deprived areas."

A minimum price is much less likely to reduce alcohol consumption by higher income earners, given that the price increase will be a smaller percentage of their income.

There is no doubt that culture is a major issue in the consumption of alcohol in Scotland. Audit Scotland's "Overview of mental health services" states clearly:

"up to one in two people with alcohol problems may have a mental health problem."

Paying more attention to early diagnosis and intervention for people with mental health issues might prevent them from resorting to alcohol as a form of self-medication.

During the committee's visits to Finland and France, we were constantly asked why we were proposing to introduce a minimum price, which would increase profits for retailers and producers, rather than a tax, which would increase income to Government. People at the French Treasury found that incredible, as did many in Finland. That is clear from today's debate.

Much has been said about whether the introduction of a minimum price is competent under EU law—an issue that is still to be resolved. The issue is not just whether the minimum price per unit will be 40p, 50p, 60p or 70p; the Parliament does not know how the approach can be compatible with EU law while we do not know whether it is the least intrusive method or whether the health benefits that are claimed for it are accurate. I was surprised that we did not receive further clarity in that regard.

The social responsibility levy has not been thought through and Government officials have not met the industry in six months.

There is no evidence for minimum pricing. We need clarity in promotional materials. The social responsibility levy has not been presented in a manner that gives confidence. On that basis, we will abstain in the vote on the motion.

10:35

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I share the view that there is no disagreement between the parties in the Parliament on Scotland's severe alcohol problems. Every health professional and voluntary organisation that gave evidence to the committee made the case for policy development and financial resources in that crucial area of social policy. We are persuaded.

We have worked our way through the submissions and through the evidence that was gathered over many hours. For the removal of doubt, I will say that I am persuaded by that evidence that minimum unit pricing is not the magic bullet that some people would have us believe it is. I will seek to have the provisions on minimum pricing amended at stage 2.

I was not elected to contribute to the passing of legislation that will potentially line retailers' pockets with billions of pounds at the expense of low-income families. The cabinet secretary was wrong in that regard. I refer her to pages 21 and 22 of the Health and Sport Committee's report. The committee quoted Dr Petra Meier, who said:

"no separate modelling has been done by income group."—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 10 February 2010; c 2715.]

Dr Meier said clearly that the Government did not request that.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Helen Eadie: Not yet.

Throughout stage 1, I have been concerned about the impact of the policy on low-income families, among other things. The cabinet secretary acknowledged that in the Sheffield study insufficient attention was paid to that aspect, because of a variety of constraints, in particular the relatively small sample sizes.

No money will come to central Government under the proposal, at a time when the Government faces unprecedented financial challenges. In written evidence to the committee, Professor Tim Stockwell from Canada said that a fundamental concern when shaping such a public policy was that there was no financial return to the Government.

Shona Robison: On the member's point about money going to supermarkets, I take it that, if it is clear that proposals on quantity discounting would also give money to supermarkets, the member will oppose them.

Helen Eadie: I am more persuaded by the argument about the universal application of a social responsibility levy. I have considered the issue in detail, but I want to hear more views. I might be persuaded to go down that route.

When Labour's alcohol commission produces its full report, we will identify other matters for Government action. Some issues in the bill are worth supporting, such as proof-of-age schemes, restrictions on promotions and the modification of licensing conditions, as well as the social responsibility levy—although, as Patrick Browne suggested in his submission, Fergus Ewing, who feverishly fought against such a proposal in the previous session of the Parliament, is in danger of being hoist by his own petard.

Minimum unit pricing is a step too far. I agree with the commentators who have said that the focus is on blunt and ineffective measures that fail to target problems where they occur. The Sheffield study was the focus of much of our discussion. Its authors' claim that their solution would work in Scotland was based on modelling. Witnesses and sometimes committee members sought to impress on me that modelling is a well-established tool on which to base our decision—Ross Finnie dwelled on that point—and cited examples that they thought would persuade me to accept their arguments.

Many members are sceptical about modelling that has led to change, not always for the better. For example, modelling led to the introduction of absurd traffic schemes in parts of our country. What about the books and websites on financial modelling and the courses on options derivatives and financial mathematics? They talk about robust financial dealings, but let us consider where modelling got many banks and companies. The Sheffield paper lacked empirical evidence and relied entirely on a theoretical approach. Research over recent days into a variety of academic papers on modelling has shown me that modelling comes with not-insignificant health warnings.

Dr Petra Meier advised the committee that modelling was like weather forecasting. Professor John Beath of the University of St Andrews told the committee that modelling could produce results that were consistent with the data but not necessarily realistic. He described how harmful drinkers can become more addicted and find it particularly difficult to cut back on consumption, and said that other non-model issues had not been factored into the Sheffield study. He told us:

“substantially increasing the price of a particular good encourages people to consider other ways in which to get that good, such as through the internet or cross-border shopping. What happens in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is an excellent example—there are even rural routes across the border and a lot of cross-border trade.”—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 24 February 2010; c 2781.]

Professor Beath said that the scale of such issues is “extraordinarily difficult” to judge.

The cabinet secretary and her officials have hugely underestimated the impact of cross-border and internet sales. I agree that that is a matter of political judgment, but I think that her judgment is wrong. David Paterson, from Asda, told the committee:

“In Northern Ireland, our store in Enniskillen, which is on the border, is the number 1 performing store in our UK chain and the number 6 performing store in the global Walmart chain.”—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 10 March 2010; c 2909.]

Finland changed its policy because of the impact of cross-border and internet sales. The cabinet secretary should take note.

Many witnesses gave us reasons why we should not accept minimum pricing or the modelling approach. Michel Perron, the chief executive officer of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, said:

“The issue is not so much consumption as the manner in which and the purpose for which alcohol is consumed ... the evidence will remain equivocal.”—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 23 March 2010; c 2997.]

For many reasons, I oppose the Government's proposal on minimum unit pricing. However, I support many measures in the bill.

10:42

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): I have not been a member of the Health and Sport Committee, but I congratulate its members on their detailed work and I welcome the debate.

I cannot think of a bill that has generated more debate among a wide cross-section of the community than the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill has done. Our young people have become extremely interested in the debate and, as a result, in the wider politics of health, crime and social responsibility. I am the mother of an 18-year-old student youth and a 17-year-old who is younger than her classmates, and goodness knows I have had my ear bent during the past year or so.

As the debate has progressed, more and more people have become aware of their drinking habits and the alcohol problem that blights Scottish society. The problem not only makes a night out in our town and city centres a frightening experience, creating no-go areas for decent folk who want a good night out, but denies people access to health services that they require. I cannot be the only member who has spent night shifts with the police or the Scottish Ambulance Service and witnessed alcohol-related incidents. Are we serving the public to the best of our abilities if ambulances are being diverted to incidents that are the result of binge drinking at home or on nights out, instead of meeting the needs of elderly people, who might have less dramatic symptoms but more serious long-term illnesses?

Aberdeen royal infirmary is not the only hospital in which, on any night of the week, beds and trolleys are blocked by people who are sleeping off the effects of too much drink. I recently obtained figures that show that alcohol-related hospital discharges in Aberdeen have increased by 30 per cent since 2004-05—that is the second highest percentage increase in Scotland. At any time, never mind in a period of public spending austerity, do taxpayers think that that is a good use of taxpayers' money and health professionals' time? I do not think so.

Scots have the eighth highest consumption of alcohol in the world. Half of all prisoners in Scotland's jails were drunk when they committed their offence. As others have mentioned, 14 of the 18 murders in Strathclyde since 1 April were drink related. An estimated one in 20 deaths in Scotland is attributable to alcohol. Our relationship with booze is killing our country. The total cost of alcohol misuse to the Scottish economy is £3.56 billion annually. Harmful drinkers spend far

less per unit than moderate drinkers do, so minimum pricing would clearly have a greater impact on them, as it is intended to do. Harmful drinkers represent an estimated 6 per cent of all drinkers but represent 41 per cent of the anticipated reduction in hospital admissions.

Murdo Fraser mentioned the Scotch Whisky Association's opposition to minimum pricing. I have worked in the whisky industry, and I remember the days when employees were given a dram at lunch time and in the evening. That practice was replaced with the provision of a bottle a month. I do not think that that happens now. Perhaps the industry has recognised the problems of harmful drinking. Murdo Fraser was selective about the information in his speech. For example, was Whyte & Mackay not forced to concede that a 40p minimum price in Scotland would mean that job losses were unlikely? Murdo Fraser's call to wait for the outcome of one budget decision on alcohol from Westminster is, frankly, derisory.

Both Richard Simpson's and Richard Baker's opposition to minimum pricing at all costs—the costs to our nation's health and wellbeing—without proposing any alternatives and kicking the proposal into the long grass by setting up a commission cannot lead to any conclusion other than that they are playing party politics with the nation's health.

Richard Baker: Does Maureen Watt accept that we have proposed a range of alternative measures, including alcohol treatment and testing orders and action on caffeinated alcohol? What consideration has she given to the potential for minimum unit pricing to increase the illicit sale of alcohol and, indeed, increase crime?

Maureen Watt: When the committee gets to stage 2, it will of course consider all of that. Of course, the bill proposes aspects other than minimum pricing.

Thank goodness that I belong to a party that was principled enough to support the Liberal Democrat-Labour Executive when it took up SNP members' suggestion on smoking legislation, instead of opposing for the sake of it. It seems that Labour opposes minimum pricing only because the SNP proposes it. Otherwise, why did Labour choose to come out against minimum pricing on the day that the bill was published and before it had heard any evidence?

I accept that minimum pricing is not a silver bullet—we have never said that it is—but it will tackle the serious problem of overconsumption of alcohol. I was in Alberta on the day that it introduced restrictions on promotional activity, sales and licensing for alcohol, and I have been interested to watch the results of that. In Scotland, the price of alcohol is at its lowest for 30 years—

that must be addressed. Minimum pricing will mean that people, especially young people, will go out drinking on fewer days of the week, because they will simply not be able to afford to do otherwise. For the Opposition to say that minimum pricing should not be tried means that it is burying its head in the sand.

10:48

Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab): I regret the comments from both the cabinet secretary and Maureen Watt about party politics, because, as far as I can hear, not only today but during the course of the debate, the only people who have tried to introduce party politics into the debate have been members of the SNP, who have consistently refused to listen to and talk and work with members of other parties. Indeed, for the past two years, I and others have called for a consensual approach and joint party working to try to come up with a solution to the problem. However, the minister and the cabinet secretary have refused to meet and work with the other parties to bring anything constructive forward.

Nicola Sturgeon: Hugh Henry might like to reflect on the last thing that he said, because I have met other parties and have always said that I would work with them on a range of proposals. Does Hugh Henry accept that there is a consensus on minimum pricing, which includes not just the SNP but doctors, nurses, the police, the royal colleges, the chief medical officers and a host of children's charities? There is a consensus—the problem is that Labour is not part of it.

Hugh Henry: The cabinet secretary may well have met people individually. The point that I have made consistently for the past two years is that there should have been a cross-party initiative or working group to meet with experts to come up with something sustainable. I commend ministers for their initiative in stimulating an alcohol debate but, unfortunately, they have refused to engage constructively with others in the Parliament, which I regret.

As others have said, the extent of our problem with alcohol is a matter of record. We now have one of the highest cirrhosis rates in western Europe—it is much higher than the rate in England. Over the past 30 years, UK cirrhosis mortality has risen by over 450 per cent across the population, with a 52 per cent increase in alcoholic liver disease between 1998 and 2002. In Scotland, chronic liver disease mortality more than doubled between 1982 and 2008.

No one can doubt the need for action. Indeed, I agree with Maureen Watt's point about the alcohol-related problems for our NHS and the

impact that they have on others. The BMA has said that, in 2008-09, there were 41,922 alcohol-related discharges from general hospitals in Scotland. I know of the problem from personal experience because I remember that when my elderly father—God rest him—fell and broke his hip on Christmas eve, he had to wait nearly three hours for an ambulance. The ambulance staff were apologetic about the length of time that it had taken, which was because of the drunkenness and mayhem that they had had to deal with on Christmas eve. That is the human consequence of the problems that we face.

We face a growing impact, too, from women drinking to excess, and Richard Baker and others have spoken about the law and order problems that excess alcohol consumption causes. In that regard, I and some of my colleagues in the west of Scotland met the chief constable of Strathclyde this week and heard about the 14 murders that were alcohol related. The chief constable was right to point out the mayhem in towns and cities across Scotland every Friday and Saturday night, which we need to address. We need to have a view in this country that that kind of public drunkenness is just unacceptable and will be dealt with. We need to stop being frivolous and making jokes about drunkenness being okay and something to aspire to. We also need action to remove licences where that is appropriate. We need more rigorous testing of alcohol sales, as Richard Simpson, Richard Baker and others have said, to ensure that young people do not have access to alcohol. I support, too, Richard Baker's call for the problem of caffeine-based alcohol drinks to be addressed, because that is a chronic problem.

I agree with the concept of the polluter paying and with social responsibility payments. However, the mayhem on the streets is not necessarily caused by pubs and other small establishments. Many young people drink before they go out. Why should the publicans pay for the problems that are caused by cheap alcohol that is sold by supermarkets? Indeed, if we are talking about the polluter, surely the polluter is the intelligent drunk person with money in their pocket or purse whose drunkenness and loutish behaviour costs the rest of society dearly. They are the people who need to be challenged and penalised for the pollution that they cause. We need more action against public drunkenness and bad behaviour.

I agree that the cost of the alcohol that is sold in supermarkets is an issue. Michael Matheson posed the point that stopping discounting would surely just put more money in the supermarkets' pockets. Well, the way I understand marketing to work is that stopping discounting reduces sales, reducing sales reduces revenue and reducing revenue reduces profits, so stopping discounting does not have the impact that he and the cabinet

secretary tried to suggest. I am also opposed to the idea of giving local authorities the ability to vary the age at which alcohol can be purchased from off-sales within their areas. In my part of Renfrewshire, would it be sensible to say that young people could buy alcohol in Johnstone but not in Linwood? What would that mean in terms of young people buying drink in other communities? Even if the legal age for off-sales was allowed to be varied between different local authorities, would it be sensible that young people could buy alcohol in Penilee, which is in Glasgow, but not in Ralston, which is in Renfrewshire? What would be the effect in places that lie on the borders between two local authority areas? Those sorts of inconsistencies would arise.

Although others have highlighted the issues with minimum pricing, one issue that has not been addressed in detail is the fact that not only would there be an increase in cross-border and internet sales but, in many communities, the criminal fraternity would then be able to sell cheap alcohol along with tobacco and drugs out of white vans. We should not underestimate the impact of that.

I hope that there is still time for us to come together as a Parliament and have a sensible debate on alcohol. I commend the cabinet secretary and her colleagues for what they have done so far, but it is time for them to face up to the fact that they should listen to the will of Parliament.

10:55

Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP): We all know that alcohol is an intrinsic part of Scottish culture. From christenings to weddings to funerals, and at every point in between, drink forms not so much a social cement as a synovial fluid that is used to allow Scots to adopt bonhomie, sentimentality, joviality, aggression and faux self-confidence in equal measure. Indeed, it sometimes provides all those personality traits at the one time. The booze can bring people together to celebrate and commiserate and, just as easily, it can rip them apart in anger and recrimination.

Do not get me wrong. It is not only the Scots who fall out over drink, but it seems that only we can fall out over how we get drink out of our culture, which it pervades at the moment. When ChildLine, Children 1st, the BMA and the churches all tell us that the issue of the excess consumption of alcohol is too important for party politicking, I believe that it is incumbent on us to listen to them and to do the business on behalf of our young people in particular.

When I was young and at school or college, drinking was hardly unknown but drink was much less available and the price was proportionately much higher than it is today. Back then, no alcohol

advertising was aimed directly at young people. Drinks were not deliberately priced at pocket-money levels. No sober-minded person thinks that alcohol being sold at less than the price of bottled water is acceptable.

The Reverend Ian Galloway, who is convener of the Church of Scotland's church and society council and a man for whose opinion I have the highest regard, has said:

"We urge you to step back from the debate about details and support the principle that addressing the affordability of alcohol through minimum pricing is a crucial part of the solution to our problems with alcohol."

Robert Brown: I accept that argument about principle, but surely to goodness the issue for the Parliament is to have legislation that works in practical terms and does the business. Is that not what today's debate should be about?

Bill Kidd: That is what the debate has been about. There might be a question over what the minimum price should be, but the cabinet secretary has already told us that that information is coming and will be central to how the bill progresses. At stage 1, we need to discuss why in principle we should advance proposals to cut the devastation that alcohol causes across Scottish society.

I for one take note of the opinion of Ian Galloway and others that the debate should not be about the SNP against Labour or Tory or Lib Dem along what might be called 40 proof ideological lines. The debate should be about what the Parliament can do for the betterment of everyone in our society and the future of our young people. Therefore, I ask for steady heads and clear vision on the part of those who, for party-political reasons, intend to oppose the bill at stage 1. We should take Scotland's problem with drink seriously enough to work together to address the social ills that excess alcohol consumption can cause.

10:59

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): My starting point for this subject is the health graph that I saw in a presentation from the chief medical officer a few months ago. The graph showed that chronic liver disease has increased by 500 per cent in Scotland over the past 25 years and, even more alarmingly, there has been an incredibly steep rise in the number of deaths over the past six or seven years. In response to that, there is no doubt that a range of measures is required. In that context, I welcome the proposals that have come forward from Labour's alcohol commission.

Where I differ from my colleagues, however, while respecting their views, is that I believe that

minimum unit pricing must be part of the mix of measures and, indeed, is the glue that holds that mix together. Some people have highlighted culture as the problem, but price is a key part of culture. I do not believe that culture can be effectively changed without dealing with the dirt-cheap prices that are a roadblock to culture change.

There may well be public resistance when we talk about minimum unit pricing in the abstract but, when we make the issue concrete by talking about the cheaper-than-water offers in supermarkets, the public acknowledge the problem and agree that something must be done about price. The fact is that no alternative effective measures to deal with the price problem have been suggested this morning—although I accept that Labour's commission's proposals on price have still to be submitted.

I am as concerned as anyone about the potential effect on low-income drinkers, which is an issue that I certainly take very seriously, but let me make two points in response. First, as others have said, poorer communities suffer the most from alcohol. Indeed, the death rate in such communities is 13.5 times greater than in the most affluent communities.

Dr Simpson: Does the member accept that there are more hazardous drinkers—the people who drink really heavily—in the richer income groups? What happens is that, when people get addicted and have become dependent on alcohol, they lose their jobs, their families and their houses and they drift down the social scale and end up in poverty. That is one of the main reasons why there are much higher rates of death in the lower groups.

Malcolm Chisholm: I will come on to precisely those points.

My second point is that analysis of the Scottish health survey indicates that people in the poorest quintile are most likely to drink nothing, to drink little or to drink very heavily. In fact, 80 per cent of people in that quintile are in the first two categories and would be minimally affected. There is, of course, a significant minority of low-income drinkers who drink very heavily. Minimum unit pricing would impact on that group and would, all the evidence suggests, lead to a reduction in their alcohol consumption.

Low-income heavy drinkers would not be the only ones whose health would benefit, given that only 9 per cent of alcohol at 40p per unit or less is sold to moderate drinkers. As Professor Anne Ludbrook shows in her study, low-income groups are not the main purchasers of cheap alcohol, because so many of them drink moderately or do not drink at all.

A wealth of evidence shows that individuals with alcohol dependence are as price sensitive as the general population. Specific as well as general evidence for that is given by Dr Bruce Ritson at column 2840 in the *Official Report* of the Health and Sport Committee meeting of 3 March 2010. A recent, very interesting study—by Black, Gill and Chick—of 377 drinkers with severe harm who attended the Royal Edinburgh hospital concluded in its key findings:

“The lower the price that a patient paid per unit, the more units he/she consumed.”

The Canadian experience is also relevant, although there was of course a different context in that country. The witnesses from Canada were extremely interesting because they backed minimum pricing as part of a basket of measures. They gave the interesting and very specific example of how, when the minimum price for 10 per cent alcohol beer was raised, its share of the market went down from 10 to 2 per cent. Crucially, there was a reduction in alcohol harm and alcohol problems.

Therefore, today's debate is not just dependent on the University of Sheffield study. However, we should not rubbish that study, given that so much public health policy is based on modelling. Indeed, we in the Labour Party put forward the minimum wage, quite correctly, on the basis of modelling.

Arguments have been made, particularly by Murdo Fraser, about the effect on jobs that was cited in the evidence of the Scotch Whisky Association. In reply to that, I believe that we should consider the hundreds of jobs that have recently been lost in Scotland because of the problem of cheap supermarket drink. I think of the closure of the Threshers chain, which was attributed exclusively to that problem. When Cockburns of Leith in my constituency had to close, it also cited the supermarket booze problem. By the week, pubs are closing for the same reason. That is why the on-trade in general supports the policy.

The bill also contains other measures that I certainly support, such as the provisions on drinks promotions that will bring the off-trade into line with the requirements that were placed on the on-trade under the 2005 act. I also support the provisions for a social responsibility levy, which could offset any increase in supermarket profits. However, I rather feel that the increase in profits has been exaggerated, given that supermarkets have not exactly rushed to support the policy, which one might expect if the policy would boost their profits by hundreds of millions of pounds.

Minimum unit pricing is the glue that holds the mix of policies together. We should definitely consider the range of expert opinion that supports

the policy: the World Health Organization, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, the police and health experts by the hundred. I could have spent the six minutes of my speech listing the eminent people who support the policy—some people might have preferred it if I had done that—and I could take another hour to cite the international studies that have been done over the years that show the link between price and consumption. No effective alternative pricing mechanism has been proposed today, so we must support the bill with the inclusion of minimum unit pricing.

11:05

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This has been a high-quality debate in which speakers from across the chamber have engaged effectively with the issues. In concluding for the Liberal Democrats, I recognise the cabinet secretary's powerful opening speech in support of her position, which was trumped only by Ross Finnie's powerful critique of the details of that position.

I have had some critical things to say about the SNP Government, but it must be acknowledged that it has raised the prominence of the severe problems that are created by alcohol abuse and the priority that Scotland gives to addressing them. In that, it has gone a certain distance towards challenging deep-seated and harmful cultural traditions in our country.

The price of excess consumption of alcohol is paid in illness, disability and premature death, as well as in life-destroying criminal activities and family-destroying abuse. We have a major national challenge, and the question is what we can do about it, particularly to change the underlying cultural norms whereby binge drinking is regarded as a normal part of life; rolling-about drunkenness is accepted as routine, if not amusing; preloading at home is the preferred evening activity; and excess alcohol feeds into masks and excuses, unacceptable levels of violence, rape and domestic abuse, and a society that is made more violent and disconnected by booze.

Throughout the debate, Liberal Democrats have argued for more stringent enforcement of the existing law, particularly against selling to drunk people and minors. We back community alcohol partnerships, and the full use by licensing boards of the extensive discretion that was given to them by the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005. I pause here to congratulate Glasgow on rejecting applications from certain supermarkets for more floor space for selling alcohol. Those same supermarkets inundate us with their views on how we should tackle alcohol excess without recognising the irony of their substantial contribution to the problem.

Liberal Democrats recognise the strong connection, confirmed by the Health and Sport Committee, between consumption, and price and availability. Accordingly, we support the banning of price discounts for alcohol products, which would be a mighty blow against the invidious practice of loss leading with those products. It must be matched by the ban on below-cost selling to which the UK Government is committed.

We do not believe that the Government has successfully made the case for minimum unit pricing, nor for its ill-thought-out proposal for a social responsibility levy. Rhoda Grant put it very well when she said that it is Parliament's duty to ensure that the Government's proposals are practical and effective. I stress the word "proposals" because—I say with respect to the cabinet secretary—the fault here is with the Government. From the beginning, the Government was told that Parliament will not support vague and ill-specified plans under either of those headings. With some degree of huffing, the Government was eventually forced to take minimum unit pricing out of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill and put it into the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill. As Ross Finnie pointed out, the policy was still to be implemented by statutory instrument, even when it became clear that the unit price would determine the central issues of the policy's legality, its likely effectiveness or relatively marginal effect on health, and the extent of any unintended consequences. That is no way to treat Parliament or win friends for the proposals. If the bill's future is in doubt today, it is entirely the fault of the Government, which was well warned.

If anything, the social responsibility levy is even worse. The Government proposes to consult on the basic question whether there will be a blanket levy on the industry, or a specific levy on bad licensees. With respect to the cabinet secretary, no self-respecting Parliament would grant that kind of Henry VIII power to a Government. The consultation should have preceded the legislation, not followed it.

The SNP has also been obsessed with a specifically Scottish solution, largely ignoring the Westminster dimension and the option of proceeding with certain measures across the UK. That might have been a result of the poor relationship between the First Minister and the previous Labour Government but, whatever the reason, it has always been a weakness in the approach. We now have a different dimension with a UK Government that is committed to a respect agenda, to working with the Scottish Government, and to moving forward on substantial plans to review duty and the pricing of alcohol. I have no inside knowledge of what the chancellor will say at the budget, but my view is that he should raise the

duty on alcohol to increase the relative price and to contribute to reducing the deficit.

Christine Grahame: Does the member accept that, when duty is increased, many supermarkets make it a point of sale to say, "The chancellor has raised the duty but we are not passing it on," and that it does not impact on the sale price?

Robert Brown: I accept that point, although Christine Grahame has slightly overstated it. Although it is not total, there is a relationship and it is clear that significant duty increases affect price.

The minister has the broad support of medical opinion for her efforts on minimum pricing. However, it is Parliament's job to test the proposals, and to ensure that they are workable and do what it says on the tin. The committee has tested the proposals and found them wanting. When prohibition was brought in in America, I imagine that it was well intentioned and had the support of the great and the good of the time, but, of course, it was a spectacular and disastrous failure because no account was taken of the unintended consequences.

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Robert Brown: I have to finish, I am afraid. It is our job as parliamentarians to look at the practicabilities, and unfortunately, the SNP Government's insouciance means that we will find it difficult to get past first base. That is a great pity, but the Government must learn some humility and accept much earlier the reasonable requests of members and the Health and Sport Committee if the bill is to have a significant future.

11:12

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): As other members have pointed out, we need to acknowledge that our society faces significant challenges when it comes to our relationship with alcohol. Too many people drink more than is good for them, and that has a devastating effect on families, communities and individuals. Everyone in the chamber undoubtedly agrees that action must be taken to address those problems. In that respect, the debate has been encouraging, because it has highlighted our consensus that we must face up to the problems and look for a way for society to address them.

As we have heard from Murdo Fraser and Mary Scanlon, the Scottish Conservatives believe that many parts of the bill, however well intended, do not address the alcohol problem that we face. Murdo Fraser spoke in detail about the problems with the Scottish Government's proposals to introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol. We all agree that the price of alcohol will be a key part

of addressing problem drinking. The difference is that Scottish Conservatives think that it should be targeted through the taxation system. Apart from the fact that the Government remains unwilling to specify the minimum price that it wants to introduce, its proposals would penalise moderate and responsible drinkers while ignoring the real issue of tackling the underlying problems that cause people to drink heavily in the first place. The minimum pricing proposals would punish rather than help those who decide to drink heavily.

Another key problem with the proposals, and one that would have a particular impact in my constituency in the Borders, is that they would create a new cross-border booze cruise culture. Individuals would be encouraged to buy more alcohol than they had planned if it was at a reduced price across the border. That comes into direct conflict with the initial intention of the bill to reduce the quantity of alcohol that is consumed irresponsibly.

The new coalition Government at Westminster has made it clear that it is opposed to a system that unfairly penalises responsible drinkers, pubs and important local industries. It would be bizarre for Scotland to introduce a system of minimum pricing that would encourage people to cross the border from Scotland to England, particularly from the Borders and central Scotland, to purchase alcohol. How would I explain to the owner of the local shop in Coldstream, where I live, why the Scottish Government has decided to drive its customers across the border to spend their money in off-licences in England? The minimum pricing proposals would encourage individuals who live in and around the Borders constituencies, such as my own, to make the short journey into English towns such as Cornhill and Berwick-upon-Tweed to purchase their alcohol.

There is considerable evidence from the Republic of Ireland that individuals are prepared to cross the border into Northern Ireland to make savings on their purchases and there are real concerns that the same behaviour could result in Scotland. Evidence from Ireland has also shown that one in four households have made the short journey across the border into Ulster to purchase alcohol from retailers to take advantage of reduced prices. As Helen Eadie highlighted, Asda's best performing store in the whole of the United Kingdom is in Enniskillen, where alcohol is about 25 per cent cheaper than it is in Dublin, from where many of the customers travel. The bill, if enacted, would act as a catalyst for cross-border trade, taking away valuable business from Scottish retailers at a time when we should be giving them full support.

Ian McKee: Does the member not accept that in this country the very same principle has already

been put into effect, in that people go past their own corner shops and buy their groceries in supermarkets because of the cheap alcohol, which takes them away from local shops? As a result, small shops all over the country are having to close down because of the unfair advantage that supermarkets have of being able to sell very cheap alcohol.

John Lamont: The bill, if it is enacted, would make matters even worse. It is important that we should be working with our colleagues south of the border to put forward a coherent proposal to minimise the impact of cross-border trade-offs.

We have concerns about other aspects of the bill. As members have heard, we oppose the social responsibility levy, which seems to be an arbitrary punishment on retailers, whether or not they act responsibly—I was particularly taken by the point that Mr Brown made in his closing remarks. The vast majority of retailers take a keen interest in preventing irresponsible behaviour by their customers; after all, they are often integral parts of the communities that they serve. Such a levy would also threaten to undermine much of the good work that many retailers do in supporting local sports clubs, charities and other organisations. That is another example of where the legislation imposes a blanket penalty, even for those who have a responsible relationship with alcohol—in this instance, responsible retailers.

As I said, there are areas of considerable agreement on the way forward. We agree that the practice of selling alcohol at below cost price should end. We also agree that better education on the dangers of binge drinking may be effective. However, it is clear that we really need better enforcement of the existing regulations. For the small number of retailers who flout the law, there should be tougher penalties and a crackdown on breaches of licensing rules.

Other members have highlighted the bill's intention to allow licensing boards to increase the legal age for buying alcohol in particular areas. As I argued during a previous debate on the SNP's proposals to increase the age limit, I cannot understand the situation in which an 18-year-old can vote, go to war and get married but cannot be trusted to buy a bottle of wine in an off-licence.

There is no evidence to support the SNP's minimum pricing policy, so we urge the Parliament to support Murdo Fraser's reasoned amendment at decision time to give us the opportunity to have a more coherent and joined-up approach to deal with this serious problem.

11:18

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Like other members, I thank the committee for its efforts in

scrutinising the bill and the Government for bringing the bill to the Parliament, because it has raised the level of debate, which I am sure will continue.

This debate was always going to be interesting. We all agree about the scale of the challenge that Scotland faces on its relationship with alcohol and we all agree about the need to take action. I agree with the cabinet secretary when she says that the mood of the country is for change; where we differ is over the effectiveness of the measures proposed.

I will deal with the less contentious parts of the bill first. We support the ban on quantity discounts, the restrictions on promotions and the age verification measures proposed. However, we oppose the power to vary the minimum purchase age, although we acknowledge that that is a compromise on the Government's previous position of raising the purchase age to 21 across the board. I have concerns that the results from Stenhousemuir and Armadale do not conclusively show that the purchase age was the significant factor; the outcomes were perhaps more the result of intensive policing and additional youth work input, so we are not convinced on that measure.

We support the social responsibility levy in principle, but there is a lack of clarity about how it will operate and who it applies to. I believe that the committee was told not to worry about that because the Scottish Government was in dialogue with the industry and they would collectively work it out and bring the proposals back. Robert Brown is right to point out that, unfortunately, the working group on that very matter has not met since August 2009, which does not fill me—or, perhaps, members of the committee—with confidence that a solution is being worked through.

I turn to the subject that gave off the most heat, if not the most light in the debate. I say at the outset that I agree with the cabinet secretary that there is a clear link between price and consumption—we have said that for some time. I also agree with her comments about the WHO—it is clear and it says that price and availability are key in reducing consumption. We need to be mindful of that. I also agree with her when she says that we need real and effective action on price. That desire is genuine and it is shared across the chamber. I do not, however—and I believe that we should not—conflate price with minimum pricing. We do not believe that minimum pricing is the answer.

Ian McKee: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: Let me develop the point; then I will be happy to give way.

We are not convinced that there is sufficient evidence, which is not to rubbish the University of Sheffield modelling report. I recognise the value of that approach, but I also recognise that one practical study of an aboriginal community in Cook Island resulted in the policy not proceeding.

There have been concerns about the legality of the proposal, which I leave to others much more qualified than I am to judge. Those concerns hinge on whether the measure is proportionate and that is in part determined by price. Ross Finnie is right that we need to know the price to scrutinise the bill effectively.

More seriously, there are concerns that minimum pricing does not have the impact that the Government claims, with little effect on young drinkers, harmful drinkers and those on reasonable incomes. Indeed, I am told that the greatest increase in consumption is among professional middle-aged women—the policy will have little impact on them. I am concerned that minimum pricing puts more money into retailers' pockets—£113 million a year—which could be spent on education, enforcement and treatment.

Ian McKee: The member has clearly spelled out her and her party's opposition to minimum unit pricing, and I do not doubt her sincerity, but I know that her party has also established a commission on alcohol. If that commission were to come out in favour of minimum unit pricing, would she accept its verdict or would she still be opposed to it?

Jackie Baillie: I look forward to receiving the commission's report over the summer. It has been told that there is no area that it cannot examine and I will take on board its conclusions as it reports them. I hope to engage the Parliament in a further debate about that.

Richard Baker rightly outlined the range of amendments that we intend to lodge on alcohol treatment and testing orders and on caffeinated alcohol. The alcohol commission that Labour set up, to which Dr McKee referred, will report in the summer and I hope that its conclusions will encourage further debate.

I turn to the Tory amendment and to Murdo Fraser. Like a very keen and overanxious puppy, Murdo, but three weeks into his new job, is eager to make a good first impression. Labour members will support his amendment because we agree with the principle, but it might more usefully have been left to stage 2 and the deliberations of the committee, which has clearly spent a lot of time on the issue. That said, the passing of the reasoned amendment will be significant: it will confirm that the majority of members in the chamber are opposed to minimum unit pricing and will, in effect, hole the policy below the waterline.

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: If Christine Grahame lets me develop the point.

We have said for some time that we do not believe that minimum unit pricing is the silver bullet and we do not believe that it is the most effective pricing mechanism that could be deployed. There can have been no doubt in the cabinet secretary's mind about that view, which has been shared across the chamber. I regret that it is only now that she talks about building a consensus for alternative measures and I regret that Hugh Henry is right in his analysis. On the one hand, she says that she is open to new ideas, but on the other she rubbishes any alternative suggestions. I could not help but recall her reaction to the interim report from Labour's alcohol commission. We are up for working together, but I fear that this is a case of more talk than action coming from the SNP. [*Interruption.*] The muttering coming from Shona Robison suggests that she is not yet on message with the new approach.

Nicola Sturgeon: Would Jackie Baillie confirm that I heard her correctly when she said, with some glee, that she wanted to hole below the waterline the policy of minimum pricing before her own commission has even had the opportunity to look at it and report? Does that not make the point, beyond any doubt, that Jackie Baillie and Labour have closed their minds to this policy for purely party-political reasons?

Jackie Baillie: Absolutely not. [*Laughter.*] If members will listen, which is something that they would always do well to do, I will repeat what we have always said, which is that the issue about minimum pricing is its effectiveness, legality and impact on those who genuinely have a problem with alcohol consumption.

The cabinet secretary can shout all that she likes from a sedentary position, but we are genuinely serious about wanting to tackle Scotland's problem with alcohol. What we will not do is take the lazy approach that conflates price with minimum pricing, because that, frankly, does not work.

Last night, I was told that the SNP's defence against the reasoned amendment was that the Parliament could not call for such a move when it had not even been told the price yet. Well, we have only been asking for the best part of a year for the cabinet secretary to name the price. First, we were told that we would be told the price when subordinate legislation came forward, at some point after May 2011. Then we were told, by no less a personage than the First Minister, that it would be at stage 3. The committee has

demanding, rightly in my view, that it should be told the price before stage 2, to enable it to do its job.

Nicola Sturgeon: But the member has made her mind up.

Jackie Baillie: I am glad that the cabinet secretary says that she will change her mind—she said earlier that she would “endeavour” to comply. The cabinet secretary has had a year in which to name the price; there should be no further delay.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I am happy to give way, if she wishes to name the price now.

Nicola Sturgeon: Have I not demonstrated this morning that I am open minded and willing to listen to the committee? Is it not the case that, regardless of when the Government names the price, Jackie Baillie has confirmed that she has already made up her mind? She said that she wants to hole minimum pricing below the waterline.

Jackie Baillie: I gave the cabinet secretary an opportunity to name the price, but she denied the Parliament the opportunity of hearing it.

We have always said that minimum pricing is not effective. Knowing the price that the Government will set will enable us to determine, first, its effectiveness and, secondly, whether the measure is legal. It is in the cabinet secretary's gift to allow the Parliament to scrutinise the proposal, but she is denying the Parliament that opportunity.

Christine Grahame: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I am sorry, but I am in my final minute.

All parties acknowledge the serious challenge that we face in properly tackling the overconsumption of alcohol. We are sincere in our desire to find the range of measures that will be required to tackle what is undoubtedly a complex problem, and we will work with others to do so. It is incumbent on the Parliament and the Government to take effective action. We are serious about that, and I detect that other parties are too. I genuinely hope that the Government can rise to the challenge. We will support it if it does.

11:28

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Like previous debates on alcohol, this one has provoked a great deal of impassioned argument, which is welcome. There have been some very good speeches from around the chamber, and I will return to them shortly.

The public expect us to show leadership and to implement policies that will have a real and lasting

effect and will make a dent in the £3.56 billion annual cost of alcohol misuse. Enough alcohol is sold in Scotland to enable every man and woman over 16 to exceed the sensible male weekly guidelines every week of the year. Many speakers have outlined the scale of the problem, but that is not enough; we also need to come up with solutions. We need to progress our alcohol agenda based on the best available evidence and expert opinion. Just last week, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence—the respected and independent assessor of effective interventions that is often quoted by Richard Simpson and others in the chamber—published a report for the UK Government that said that alcohol needs to be less affordable if we are to save thousands of lives each year. It specifically recommended minimum pricing as a targeted measure that was most likely to affect heavy drinkers, who typically buy cheaper alcohol.

I want to put on record my thanks to the youth commission on alcohol, which has spent a huge amount of time considering all the evidence and the issues. I welcome its support for the key elements of the bill.

I will now deal with some of the speeches that we heard during the debate.

Murdo Fraser was confused in that, although he seemed to say that he understood and accepted the link between price and consumption, he went on to cite, minutes later, the Scotch Whisky Association's evidence against that link to back up his argument. He was not the only one who did that. A number of others in the chamber displayed a similar confusion about that link, even though all the evidence makes it clear that there is a link between price and consumption.

Murdo Fraser: I accept that there is a link between price and consumption, as I made clear in my speech, but the matter is complex. The link is not simple, which is why simply bringing in minimum pricing will not cure the problem. That is also why, at a UK level, we are committed to targeted increases in duty on problem drinks. We believe that that is the right way forward.

Shona Robison: If the member believes that there is a link between price and consumption, he should not lead with evidence that undermines that argument, as that undermines his position.

Murdo Fraser said that the evidence base is not there, but I am sure that his speech is the same one—almost word for word, if anyone cares to look back and check—that was used by the Tories when they opposed the ban on smoking in enclosed public spaces. Scotland was brave at that time and took the proposal forward, even though many people were saying, "Where's the evidence? No one else has done it."

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Shona Robison: Not just now.

Murdo Fraser also said that we should listen to experts in the field, but that seems to apply only to people in the alcohol industry, not to health professionals. Why is that? If we must listen to experts in the field, surely we should also listen to experts on health. Murdo Fraser's choice of experts seems to be selective.

Christine Grahame gave a good account of the tremendous amount of work that the Health and Sport Committee put into taking evidence from all sides of the debate and compiling a good report. Obviously, the report did not agree with everything in the bill, but it was a considered report, and we should pay tribute to the committee for it.

Richard Simpson's speech was disappointing, and I mean that genuinely. He talked about the need to change culture. That is easy to say, but MSPs will be judged on their actions, not their words, and there was not one line in Richard Simpson's speech that said anything about what Labour would do to tackle the link between price and consumption. He said that we must change the culture around drinking, just as we changed the culture around tobacco and drink driving, and that it might take a generation to do that. However, the Government legislated on those issues, which is why we need to legislate on alcohol. Richard Simpson was unable to provide any alternatives to the Government's approach. The worst part of Richard Simpson's speech—I mean this sincerely—was his attack on respected academics, who are not here to defend themselves. I think that he will live to regret that because, as others have said, the modelling that has been used in this context has been used in relation to other policies that Labour has backed and will no doubt be used in relation to policies that Labour will back in future.

Richard Simpson and other Labour members said something else that requires some explanation. One of the Opposition's key reasons for opposing minimum pricing is that it will put money into the pockets of supermarkets, but the same argument can be made in relation to legislation on quantity discounting, which Labour supports. Labour cannot have such an inconsistent position in its arguments if it hopes to have any credibility whatsoever on the issue.

Jackie Baillie: Does the minister agree that we should seek to have the money that is accrued from discount bans invested in treatment, enforcement and education? Does she acknowledge that the University of Sheffield's modelling shows that the impact of discount bans is far greater than the impact of minimum unit pricing?

Shona Robison: No, on the second point; that is absolutely not the case. On the point about how we address the issue of quantity discounting and avoid the scenario that Jackie Baillie claims to be concerned about, the answer is that we should use the social responsibility levy, in the same way that we would use that measure to deal with any income that was raised by supermarkets in relation to minimum pricing—exactly the same mechanism, exactly the same solution.

Ross Finnie gave a reasonable speech. He made the important point that the modelling that is used in the Sheffield study is commonly used in other policy development, particularly in public health policy. However, the Liberal Democrats are in some difficulty on one issue. Robert Brown tried to compare minimum unit pricing with prohibition, which was a rather silly point in what was otherwise a good speech. We must remember that, when the Liberal Democrats developed their manifesto for the general election and they included minimum unit pricing, all the matters were presumably considered, and the Liberal Democrats were obviously persuaded by the merits of minimum unit pricing. It is disappointing that they have been unable to follow that through in the Parliament. I hope that they will reflect on that.

Michael Matheson made a good speech. He dealt well with the arguments about the impact on low-income households and the fact that so many of the organisations that represent families who live in poverty support minimum unit pricing.

Richard Baker made a far more measured speech than he has perhaps made on other occasions, but he failed to make the case that removing caffeine from alcohol would be an effective measure to tackle a problem of this scale. I do not think that anyone on the Labour benches can seriously argue that a ban on caffeine in alcoholic drinks, which would affect such a small proportion of alcohol products, would have such an effect. The Food Standards Agency has made the point that there is no evidence whatsoever to back that up. We have never said that minimum unit pricing is a panacea. Richard Baker alluded to that. What we have said is that it is part of a package of measures.

Ian McKee gave an excellent speech. His point was twofold. First, he said that, if everyone waited for someone else to act, nothing would be done. How true that is, particularly in public health policy. We have to be bold, to try things out, and to gather the evidence from that. The ban on smoking in enclosed public places did just that, and look at what has happened—countries throughout the world are emulating that policy. Ian McKee also said that low-cost alcohol is used as a loss leader

to get customers through the supermarket doors. That is a fundamental point in the debate.

Like many members, Rhoda Grant seemed confused about whether there is a link between price and consumption. A number of people on the Labour benches seemed to question whether that link exists. That goes to the heart of Labour confusion on the issue. Labour members need to be clear about where they stand on it.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to close, minister.

Shona Robison: Some other good points were made. Malcolm Chisholm's speech was head and shoulders above many others. His position is not an easy one to adopt and he should get credit for it. Perhaps his experience as a health minister contributed to it.

I am happy to support the motion in the name of Nicola Sturgeon.

Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

11:40

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S3M-5691, in the name of John Swinney, on the financial resolution in respect of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill, agrees to (a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3(b)(ii) of the Parliament's Standing Orders and (b) any charges or payments in relation to which Rule 9.12.4 of the Standing Orders applies, arising in consequence of the Act.—[*Shona Robison.*]

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

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Midlothian Community Hospital

1. Rhona Brankin (Midlothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when the Midlothian community hospital will open and what services it will offer. (S3O-10836)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): Although an opening date for the Midlothian community hospital has not yet been agreed, it is anticipated that the pre-commissioning handover will be on 9 August 2010 and that all services will be operating before mid-September. That is earlier than the originally anticipated fully operational date of 4 October 2010.

The hospital will offer four in-patient ward areas and a day hospital area. There are also a number of clinical consultation rooms and diagnostic and therapy services that will be accessed by visiting patients.

Rhona Brankin: Will it have an out-patient department that includes X-ray services, child health and physiotherapy, with four treatment rooms? Will it include provision for out-of-hours services? Will the cabinet secretary confirm that those services will be part of the new hospital? What assurance can she give that the planned services at the hospital will be unaffected by the cutting of 333 nursing and midwifery posts in Lothian?

Nicola Sturgeon: I would have thought that Rhona Brankin might welcome the fact that a major new community hospital will be opening in her constituency earlier than anticipated. I think that that is really good news, but as usual we get the glass-half-empty approach from Labour.

I am happy to send Rhona Brankin a full list of the services that will be available in the Midlothian community hospital but, for example, we will have, on the ground floor, primary care out-of-hours services, radiography, physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapy and a range of other facilities. I am more than happy to send her a full list of the facilities, and I certainly look forward to seeing what I am sure will be a fantastic new facility being fully operational as soon as possible.

Newly Qualified Teachers

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

To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to help newly qualified teachers into work. (S3O-10835)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government has taken a number of actions to help to support post-probation teachers into work. We made the difficult decision to reduce the intake of student teachers, which will free up more posts for newly qualified teachers, and we created a scheme to allow local authorities to borrow up to £10 million to cover the up-front costs of early retirement, and so free up jobs for newly qualified teachers. It is disappointing that only two councils have applied to participate in the scheme. However, we know that some councils—including Fife Council and North Ayrshire Council—are encouraging teachers to retire early and are choosing to manage that through their existing resources.

We continue to work closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities to achieve better reconciliation between local and national teacher workforce planning with a view to re-establishing an appropriate balance between teacher supply and demand.

Sarah Boyack: I thank the minister for his warm words, but I tell him that the real worries are for this year's probationary teachers, who look at the statistics and know that only 30 per cent of the 2008-09 cohort obtained a permanent contract. That is down from more than 50 per cent a couple of years ago. Of that group, nearly 14 per cent have still not found jobs—double the rate of two years ago. The minister talks about work with local authorities, but given that there were only 20 vacancies in Edinburgh's primary and secondary schools in February, what reassurance can he give new teachers who trained in Scotland that they will get jobs here rather than having to leave the teaching profession or look for jobs further afield?

Michael Russell: I am closely engaged in the issue. I entirely accept Sarah Boyack's concern; nobody wants newly qualified teachers to be unable to find full-time, permanent employment. A strong discussion is going on to see how we can help at every single part of an individual's professional progression through training into education. However, the sharp point is that local authorities are having to make differences to their expenditure and there are problems in employment.

With the best will in the world, let me ask a question that was posed by Hugh Reilly in his column in *The Scotsman* yesterday. Of course, it

is a rhetorical question. I recognise that question time is for others to ask questions and not for me to do so, but this rhetorical question is worth posing. He asked whether it is true that the Labour Party would

"immediately order the hiring of thousands of teachers"

if it came into government. Does it recognise the difficulty of doing so? Will it work with everybody to assist in addressing the difficulty rather than trade on it politically? By doing that, the Labour Party is attacking the very people it claims to be helping.

Cardiovascular Disease and Oral Hygiene

3. Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Executive how it plans to respond to the findings by Professor Richard Watt of University College London that people who rarely brush their teeth are 70 per cent more likely to suffer heart disease than those who brush twice a day and his view that these results confirm the link between oral hygiene and the risk of cardiovascular disease. (S3O-10840)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison):

We acknowledge Professor Watt's finding of an association between oral health and the risk of cardiovascular disease, and we await further research in the area. However, the best way of preventing gum disease is to have a regular effective toothbrushing habit from an early age. The childsmile programme will ensure that all children who attend nursery are offered daily toothbrushing, which paves the way to establishing long-term good oral health throughout adulthood. Only this week, a report on the national dental inspection programme showed that the Scottish Government has successfully met the target of 60 per cent of primary 7s having no obvious signs of tooth decay.

Helen Eadie: I am disappointed that the minister will await further research before she takes any action. How does she propose to address the concerns that are raised in Professor Watt's report, given that Scotland has unacceptably high levels of heart disease? In particular, will she focus her actions and attention on middle-aged and older people who have particular issues in that regard?

Shona Robison: I thought that Helen Eadie might have brought herself to welcome the announcement that the target of 60 per cent of primary 7s having no obvious signs of tooth decay has been met. I am pleased to say that, in Fife, 67.2 per cent of primary 7 children are free of dental decay. That should lead Helen Eadie to believe that what we are doing with the childsmile programme is working and delivering, and will help to avoid some of the risks of cardiovascular disease that Professor Watt's findings show. I

hope that Helen Eadie can for once welcome some good news.

Tricia Marwick (Central Fife) (SNP): Does the minister agree that having access to a national health service dentist is the best way to improve oral hygiene? Is she aware that, in 2006, not a single dentist in Glenrothes took new NHS patients and that thousands of people were deregistered, and that, since 2007, two new NHS practices have been opened in Glenrothes and a new dental centre is planned for Glenrothes and Methil? Is she aware that 50,000 more people in Fife are registered with an NHS dentist than were registered under Labour in 2006?

Shona Robison: Tricia Marwick has shown the Government's determination to deliver improved dental health for the people of Fife. To add to what she has said about the success of new premises, Fife was allocated £6.11 million from the primary and community care premises modernisation programme, and the number of dentists who provide general dental services increased from 177 in 2007 to 198 in 2009. I know that Labour does not like to welcome good news, but perhaps for once it can get behind our dentists, who are doing a very good job in Fife and elsewhere.

Agenda for Change (School Nurses)

4. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is taking action to help school nurses resolve outstanding claims under the agenda for change programme. (S3O-10856)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): The primary responsibility for taking forward all aspects of agenda for change implementation lies with national health service boards in conjunction with local staff side partners. The Government continues to monitor the process closely and has put in place measures to support boards where they are required. Those measures include the blocked matching protocol, which can be employed where there is a failure to agree on outcomes locally. The protocol is being applied in respect of school nurses in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board area.

Ken Macintosh: Does the cabinet secretary think that it is acceptable that school nurses throughout Scotland have been graded in band 6, whereas those in Glasgow have been asked to accept band 5? Is she aware that those school nurses have not had a pay rise for the past five years because of that initial banding? Rather than let the matter drag on for another summer, is there a date by which the cabinet secretary will intervene and take action rather than just monitor the situation?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am sure that Ken Macintosh appreciates and understands that, as we have in place a process involving review panels that has been agreed locally with unions, it would be wrong of me to express an opinion on which band somebody should be matched to. I have explained to him and others before that, under the agenda for change system, just because people in different parts of the country have the same job title, that does not mean that they have exactly the same job responsibilities or that they will be matched to the same band.

That said, I understand the frustration of school nurses and others for whom the issue has not yet been resolved. The issue relating to school nurses in Glasgow is not that the reviews have not been carried out; it is that the review panels have not been able to agree on the banding. That is why the blocked matching protocol has been introduced. Under that protocol, posts can be referred to the Scottish terms and conditions committee, which will consider the evidence and, if necessary, set up a fresh national level matching panel process. Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has now written to STAC on accessing that protocol for school nurses.

I understand the frustration of people in such a position, but it is important that the right banding is arrived at following a robust process. I hope and expect that the process will be concluded for school nurses as soon as possible.

Affordable Warmth

5. David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to improve affordable warmth. (S3O-10871)

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): The Government is proud of its work to improve affordable warmth. Through our acclaimed energy assistance package, we have helped more than 67,000 households. Some 13,000 homes will have been improved under the 2009-10 budget, of which at least 11,500 will have heating system measures. We are also reducing the cost of heating for many other households with the delivery of insulation through the home insulation scheme and the boiler scrappage scheme, under which old, inefficient boilers will be replaced. Social landlords are continuing to work towards achieving energy efficiency aspects of the Scottish housing quality standard for social landlords.

David Whitton: The boiler scrappage scheme, which the minister mentioned, was launched on Monday 24 May. In Scotland, only 5,000 vouchers were available compared with 125,000 vouchers in England, and they were fully allocated within 36 hours. That left many people disappointed,

including one of my constituents, who discovered when he called on launch day that, in order to have had any chance of getting a voucher, he would have needed all the paperwork and quotes ready there and then. How many boiler scrappage scheme applicants were left disappointed due to a lack of Government funding for the scheme? What plans does the minister have to assist them?

Alex Neil: Some 4,600 people have received assistance through the boiler scrappage scheme, which is very popular. If our budget had not been cut by £500 million this year, we would have been able to do much more. We would have liked to have done much more but, unfortunately, the Labour Government cut our budget.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The minister will be aware, as I have raised the issue in the chamber before, that when elderly and less well-off people shop around for the best deal for oil and gas heating, they are faced with a take-it-or-leave-it minimum quantity that they must purchase, and that minimum quantity is often larger and far more costly than they can possibly afford. Will the minister agree to consider that problem while we still have time before the onset of the winter?

Alex Neil: I am happy to consider that problem, although it is primarily an issue for the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. I am happy to make representations to it on the issue, as it affects quite a number of people throughout Scotland.

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

Bannockburn Heritage Centre

7. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has had further discussions with the National Trust for Scotland since September 2009 regarding the future of the Bannockburn heritage centre. (S3O-10876)

I refer to my membership of the National Trust for Scotland in asking that question.

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Yes. Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and the centre for digital design and visualisation have been working together successfully to progress the preliminary stages of the battle of Bannockburn project. The first draft of the business plan is in production. The project will form one of the centrepiece developments for homecoming 2014, planning for which has already started.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the minister for that welcome news. As we know, the 700th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn, which is during the 2014 year of homecoming, is coming up. I am sure

that the minister agrees that the Bannockburn visitor centre is now looking very tired and in need of refurbishment. Will she consider the model that the National Trust developed at Culloden battlefield, for example, as one that could be followed to develop a fitting visitor centre at Bannockburn that will attract visitors to the Stirling area and, indeed, to Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: I assure the member that the plans for Bannockburn are extremely ambitious and exciting. We are nearing the end of a European tendering exercise. Submissions are about to be made by an appointed architect-led design team.

I recall that the last time Murdo Fraser asked me about the work of the National Trust for Scotland at Bannockburn was when he objected to school pupils from far-flung areas being given funding to take buses to visit Bannockburn. He might want a new centre; it is just disappointing that he does not want children to be able to get there to see it.

Scottish Fishermen's Federation (Meetings)

8. Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. (S3O-10918)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): I last met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation at the fisheries expo in Glasgow on 21 May. The most recent meeting with officials took place last week.

Liam McArthur: Has the cabinet secretary had an opportunity to discuss with the federation the concerns that appear to be growing about the conservation credits scheme and the operation of the conservation credits scheme steering group? The retrospective application of the reduction in the base rate of days at sea, the manner in which monkfish quota transferability has been handled by his Government and the threatened loss of the deepwater edge along the so-called French line are all causing concern and division in the industry. The conservation credits scheme was set up to provide credits for developing and complying with initiatives, in partnership, so that the industry would have a more secure future. Will the cabinet secretary give urgent attention to the growing concerns about the group and the way in which the scheme is operating?

Richard Lochhead: I assure the member that I am giving urgent attention to a number of the concerns that face the white-fish sector, in particular, at the current time. The conservation credits scheme is one of a number of innovative steps forward that we have taken by working closely with the fishing industry against the

challenging backdrop of the damage that the common fisheries policy is causing to Scotland.

The member mentioned the amendment to the number of days of sea that has been implemented by the conservation credits scheme steering group this year. One of the innovative results of that new relationship is that we can buy back some of the days that were cut by adopting the further conservation measures that the fleet could put into practice. That is a significant achievement, which has been made despite the constraints of the common fisheries policy.

I will give my attention to a number of the issues that the member raises.

General Practitioner Practices (Premium-rate Numbers)

9. Angela Constance (Livingston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how many GP practices use 084 premium-rate numbers and whether it has any plans to actively discourage the use of such numbers by GP practices. (S3O-10892)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): As at 3 June this year, there were 44 GP practices using 084 telephone numbers, which represents just over 4 per cent of the total number of practices in Scotland.

We intend to discuss the issue with the Scottish general practitioners committee, which is supportive of the idea that all patients should pay local telephone rates and is considering offering guidance to those practices that use 084 telephone numbers to encourage them to review their current telephone contracts. The Scottish Government would support that.

Angela Constance: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will recall the representations that I have been making on behalf of many of my constituents, who are having to bear the increased costs associated with the use of such telephone numbers by GP practices. Does she agree that it is wholly unacceptable for patients to bear those increases in their phone bills, which, for the many who need to make regular and repeated calls to their doctor's surgery, have been significant?

Nicola Sturgeon: I can understand that view and the frustration on the part of patients. I am sure that Angela Constance will appreciate that only a small number of GP practices in Scotland use 084 telephone numbers, but the practice can lead to increased costs for the patients who use such services. That is why it is important that we work with the general practitioners committee to encourage GP practices that use such numbers to offer local telephone rates instead, if possible. I will be more than happy to keep Angela

Constance updated on the progress of those discussions.

Crofting Communities (Rabbits)

10. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to assist crofting communities that are facing large increases in their local rabbit population. (S3O-10889)

The Minister for Environment (Roseanna Cunningham): There are no plans to provide additional assistance to crofting communities for the control of rabbit populations, but there are wide-ranging consents that enable land managers to control rabbits. In addition, measures are available under the rural priorities element of the Scotland rural development programme to control rabbit populations, where those are directly linked to a management option.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Allan, I must ask you to be brief.

Alasdair Allan: I will be. I thank the minister for her reply, but she will be aware that many communities, such as Ness in my constituency, have seen the rabbit population grow to a ridiculous extent and would be grateful for any clarification of the legal options for dealing with the problem.

The Presiding Officer: Please be as brief as possible, minister.

Roseanna Cunningham: Shooting, trapping, snaring, ferreting, long netting, gassing and the use of electric or other rabbit-proof fencing are all legal methods of rabbit control.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for the brevity of that answer. That concludes general questions.

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-2457)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have a range of engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland including, I am delighted to say, the announcement of 5,000 new modern apprenticeship places, which have been made possible with the use of European social fund money. Those extra modern apprenticeships, which are for all ages, bring the total number of opportunities for work-focused training in Scotland to almost 40,000 this coming year. I know that Iain Gray will want to congratulate Skills Development Scotland on its success in this initiative.

Iain Gray: The First Minister well knows that I always welcome apprenticeships. That is good news indeed. Unfortunately, when it comes to the economy in Scotland, it is not all good news. We have also read today about the loss of 350 printing jobs in Dundee. Unemployment is still higher in Scotland than it is in the rest of the country, our growth is still trailing that of the United Kingdom and this week we saw that small business start-up rates are lower in Scotland than they are in the rest of the UK. Alex Salmond said that he would make Scotland the most competitive nation in the UK. What has he actually done?

The First Minister: Of course, through every year of Labour's term in office, Scotland underperformed against the UK and just about every country in Europe in terms of growth. Iain Gray is right in the sense that we face serious challenges with the economic situation. Therefore, when examples such as the work of Skills Development Scotland and efforts to internationalise Scottish business bear fruit, we should congratulate those who are involved.

That is why I was delighted to see the new UK regional trade estimates on the value of UK goods exported up until the end of March, which were published just an hour or two ago. In this serious situation of recession, exports from England fell by 4.8 per cent; from Wales by 16.8 per cent; and from Northern Ireland by 17.4 per cent. However, the report shows that up until March 2010 exports from Scotland rose by 3.5 per cent. That is an extraordinary performance by Scottish exporters who are facing the most difficult international climate. Although we should of course congratulate the individual companies involved,

we should also welcome the efforts of our agencies in promoting international trade.

Iain Gray: My question, of course, was about what the First Minister has done. One of the things that he has in train is a revaluation of business rates. In the past, he has said that most businesses will benefit from this revaluation. However, I have with me the figures for a typical Scottish high street. In the town of Ballater, there are 18 small businesses that are all just getting by in tough times. I acknowledge that, last year, 12 businesses did not pay any rates because of the small business bonus; however, this year, that has turned into the small business bombshell for those businesses, all but two of which face a massive rates increase. None of them is better off and, this year, Ballater's high street will pay about 470 per cent more in rates than it did last year. Can the First Minister tell us how much extra money his Government is raking in from these punitive increases in small business rates?

The First Minister: I will try to explain the process of rating revaluation. It is set by independent assessors and does not benefit the Government for the obvious reason that 60 per cent of businesses in Scotland will be no worse or better off as a result. If we were to introduce a transitional scheme, it would mean that the people who would benefit—those who had been evaluated independently, their businesses found to be struggling so that their business rates came down—would have to pay for those who had been revalued upwards.

I am pleasantly surprised that Iain Gray has mentioned the small business bonus. My clear recollection is that that extraordinary business bonus scheme, which has benefited 100,000 and more small businesses throughout Scotland, has been criticised and attacked by the Labour Party. If Iain Gray's question represents a conversion to the significant efforts that are being made to boost small business in Scotland, I will join the Small Business Federation in suggesting that it is better that one sinner repenteth.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I ask both participants to speed up a little. We are six minutes in and have got only two questions out of the way.

Iain Gray: The trouble is that nobody in the business world believes that 60 per cent of businesses are better off. Last week in the Parliament we had 26 nursery owners from Fife, all of whom will see their rates soar; seven of them will pay 150 per cent more and one of them will pay 200 per cent more. In my constituency, Alexander Pollock Ltd engravers' rateable value has gone up from £25,300 to £41,800. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce tells me that the worst example that it has been able to find is in

Ballater again, where a restaurant faces an increase of over 400 per cent in rates payable. The First Minister should probably not drop in there for lunch on his way home tomorrow. Does he understand that such hikes in rates could close those businesses down?

The First Minister: I do not know about Iain Gray's understanding of geography—it would be a substantial detour to go to Ballater on the way to the north-east of Scotland. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Iain Gray's knowledge of Ballater is greater than his question suggests.

Information on the effect of the rates revaluation, which exists in statute and is independently revalued, is there for all to see. It is a fact that 60 per cent of businesses will be no worse or better off. It is also a fact that among the range of incentives and supports that are offered to not just small businesses but to businesses across the business rates range, our position is far superior to anything else in these islands. In particular, the small business bonus scheme, which has been bitterly opposed by Iain Gray's party throughout the past three years, is the envy of every other country in the United Kingdom and is supported by every small business in Scotland.

Iain Gray: It is a fact that small and medium-sized enterprises employ thousands in Scotland. It is a fact that the rates hikes put those jobs in danger. It is a fact that in England, the same changes are staggered over five years. It is a fact that in Northern Ireland they have stopped the process because of the damage that it will do to the economy.

If Alex Salmond will not listen to me, perhaps he will listen to the managing director of Alexander Pollock, who says in his letter to me:

"This is Scottish Industry we are talking about and our own legislators are doing their best to put us out of business.

Can you help?

Yours despairingly".

The First Minister can help. Will he stop this crazy revaluation right now?

The First Minister: Rates revaluation is in statute and is part of the process of business rates. Rates are independently evaluated. I repeat that if we introduced a transitional scheme, those who would benefit—the majority—from the rates revaluation would have to pay more. I am sure that even Iain Gray would not suggest the unfairness of saying to businesses whose rates have been revalued downwards as a result of an independent process of revaluation that they should be asked to pay for Labour's recession.

The most important point of all is that there is no benefit for the Government in a rates revaluation.

Rates are evaluated according to an independent process. However, the support that is on offer to small businesses in Scotland is unparalleled and unrivalled across these islands.

Given that the Labour Party's only response to the huge and serious budget pressures that it has created is to suggest that we should go ahead with £332 million of further cuts this year, people knowing that and noting the apparent concern that has been expressed for businesses will find it very difficult to reconcile how Labour, in calling for cuts in public spending in Scotland this year, can be in a position to offer help to anyone, whether in public services or in the business community.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

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

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2458)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I met the Secretary of State for Scotland on Monday and Tuesday of this week.

Annabel Goldie: I have asked the First Minister on numerous occasions to spell out his plans for sorting out the mess that Labour has made of the UK finances. No answer has he given. Labour has left this country with the biggest national debt that we have ever seen. Although it is Labour's mess, it is also the First Minister's responsibility to sort things out in Scotland. The buck stops with him.

Do not take my word for it, Presiding Officer. The First Minister's colleague, Andrew Welsh, convener of the Finance Committee, says that the Scottish Government needs to show far greater leadership,

"to set out more fully"

what the Government will do and to

"demonstrate real leadership by setting out spending choices in an open and transparent manner."

Does the First Minister agree with Andrew Welsh?

The First Minister: I agree that we will set out the

"spending choices in an open and transparent manner."

That is exactly the process that is being engaged in by the independent budget review, which will be reporting shortly. Every public service in Scotland is making preparations for the time of austerity to come.

Annabel Goldie is being a bit disingenuous not to accept that her new Chancellor of the Exchequer announced only this week a public consultation on the comprehensive spending review. Unless Annabel Goldie is telling me that the objectives and detail of that spending review

have already been decided before the public consultation, she surely wishes us—in the atmosphere of respect and acknowledgement that exists between the Governments north and south of the border—to contribute to that discussion. Substantial risks will be taken with recovery and employment if the chancellor's reported plans go ahead unaltered.

Annabel Goldie: Not for the first time I see a complete lack of connection between my question and the First Minister's answer. I am not asking about George Osborne's budget; I am asking about the Scottish budget, as known to the First Minister. I have been asking the First Minister about it for well over a year now, and the Finance Committee has now backed that call.

The First Minister might rely on bluff and bluster to duck his responsibility, but this is at a new level. Members of the Parliament are now demanding his plans. Members of his own party, however embarrassing it may be to him, are now demanding his plans. Why is the First Minister dodging the issue?

John Swinney has admitted that on his desk are secret plans to make savings—

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): "Secret plans". My goodness!

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Annabel Goldie: Something that exists but that is not disclosed to others is a secret. Secret plans to make savings have been drawn up by John Swinney's civil servants. Now is the time to be transparent. We should be told what the Scottish Government is going to do. The First Minister should show some leadership and stop the secrecy. When is the First Minister going to come clean about his budget?

The First Minister: I remind Annabel Goldie of the process under which the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government operate at present. The funding comes through a block grant, substantially from Westminster. We know what the block grant is for this year, and we have set a budget for this year as a result.

We do not know what the block grant will be for next year, for the year after or for the year after that, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not announced his emergency budget yet, never mind the comprehensive spending review, which will be published in the autumn. As I have just said, I am willing to say that every public service is preparing for times of fiscal austerity, acknowledging the previous chancellor's remarks that the cuts to come will be tougher and deeper than those of Margaret Thatcher. However, even Annabel Goldie would not expect John Swinney—far-

sighted though he is—to know the figures on which to set his budget before they have been set by the Westminster chancellor who is responsible for handing down 90 per cent of that budget. Annabel Goldie should give us the figures and not make them a secret. She will then find that John Swinney is able to do the job.

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-2459)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland will be discussed.

Tavish Scott: Last week, the First Minister wrote directly to the councillor who is in charge of education in each of Scotland's 32 local authorities. There were lots of issues that he could have raised, including school buildings, places for probationer teachers, the curriculum for excellence, strikes in the classroom, teacher training and his broken class-size promise. Will he tell Parliament today what his letter was about?

The First Minister: I wrote a letter specifically at the request of a former MSP, Dennis Canavan, who piloted a bill for a St Andrew's day holiday through the Parliament. Many of us think that a public holiday on our national day would be a substantial and progressive move. Given the fact that the Parliament passed the bill not unanimously, but by a substantial majority, I hope that there is no reneging on the issue by the Liberal Democrats. Dennis Canavan approached me at a meeting some weeks ago and suggested that we renew our efforts to see whether local authorities around Scotland would be able to follow the policy lead that was taken by the Scottish Parliament, and I wrote to local authorities on that subject.

Tavish Scott: So, it is Dennis Canavan's fault. Despite all the problems in Scottish education, Alex Salmond says that that is the "important matter" that merits a letter from the First Minister. It turns out that the SNP Government has written to councils about the matter before, without much luck. The First Minister's letter says:

"I was disappointed to discover ... only four authorities actually got back to us with their views".

Only four education conveners out of 32 replied, even though 12 of those 32 are paid-up, card-carrying members of the SNP. Not even they think that the matter is important enough.

When will the First Minister write to education conveners about education? Does he not believe that his priority is just wrong? In August, 54,000 children will start a new curriculum and Scottish

schools are not ready. Teachers cannot get jobs. Why does the First Minister think that it is more important to write about a holiday than it is to sort out what is happening in our classrooms?

The First Minister: The curriculum for excellence is being pursued by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, who has announced a range of initiatives to help with its implementation. The vast majority of people in the Parliament and throughout the country support the curriculum for excellence, even if Tavish Scott is doubtful about its objectives.

I have known Dennis Canavan for many years as a parliamentarian both at Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament, and I am proud to be associated with the initiative that he piloted through the Parliament. I think that it is a thoroughly good thing to have St Andrew's day—the day of our patron saint—established as a public holiday in Scotland. Once upon a time, the Liberal Democrats, when they were a party of Opposition in London and a party of Government in Scotland, believed that as well. In the past few days, we have seen the dramatic conversion of Murdo Fraser to the concept of a new Bannockburn visitor centre with all its attendant symbolism and importance for Scotland. One day, we will see the re-conversion of Tavish Scott to a patriotic national holiday for the Scottish people on St Andrew's day.*[Interruption.]*

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP): I wish to declare an interest, in that my brother works for D C Thomson and has been informed that his job is at risk, and my dad is in receipt of a works pension.

The First Minister is aware of the potential 350 job losses at D C Thomson in Dundee. Like mine, nearly every family in Dundee has a connection to D C Thomson, which employs about 2,000 people from the city. It has a loyal workforce, many of whom would want to continue to work for the company. I am pleased to have heard a commitment from the management to minimise the number of compulsory redundancies. I know that the Government's partnership action for continuing employment team will work with any staff who are made redundant to identify re-employment opportunities and training needs.

I ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government can direct the PACE team to consider the possibility of working with D C Thomson to support retraining of staff to allow redeployment within the D C Thomson organisation.

The First Minister: I share the constituency member's concern. Even in a city, 350 job losses is a substantial number. I spoke to the chairman of D C Thomson earlier this week. I can confirm that

the Scottish Government has acted immediately to offer support through PACE. That initiative will be available to those D C Thomson employees who face redundancy.

The national PACE manager spoke to the D C Thomson head of employee relations at 10 am this morning to outline the support that is available through PACE and to provide further information on PACE support for the company to consider. I understand that the company intends to set up a job shop on site. PACE representatives will contact the company again next week and will maintain close liaison to ensure that affected employees receive the maximum support possible. Although the PACE initiative, by definition, is there to ameliorate and respond to a major industrial closure, it has had substantial success in placing people in new jobs in a number of serious situations. We all wish it well in responding to this one in Dundee.

Joint Ministerial Committee (Meetings)

4. Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister what matters were discussed at the most recent meeting of the joint ministerial committee. (S3F-2462)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): John Swinney, Fiona Hyslop and I attended the plenary session of the joint ministerial committee on Tuesday 9 June, which was hosted by the Prime Minister. There were a number of substantial outcomes, one of which was a commitment that ministers of the Scottish Government and the other devolved Administrations will attend and speak at European Council meetings and, where appropriate, represent the United Kingdom at those meetings.

Jamie Hepburn: I welcome the achievements of the Scottish Government in getting the JMC structure to deliver some positive changes for Scotland. Is there a lesson in the outcome of this week's meetings that the devolution settlement must never return to a situation in which any UK Government treats Holyrood simply as a department of Whitehall, to be bullied or ignored as it sees fit?

The First Minister: There is a substantial amount in that question. I should remind members that the tendency of some people in central Government to treat this Parliament and, indeed, other assemblies and Parliaments in that fashion did not arise with the advent of the SNP Government but predated it. Indeed, the JMC plenary, which is the key meeting between ministers, First Ministers and Prime Ministers, did not take place between October 2002 and June 2008, when it was revived.

I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister chaired the meeting on Tuesday. There are substantial differences, particularly in the approach to economic policy and public spending, between all three of the devolved Administrations and the coalition Government in London. Nonetheless, on a variety of issues that are important for the people of Scotland, progress was achieved on Tuesday, and I welcome the commitment of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister in attending that meeting.

VisitScotland

5. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): To ask the First Minister when he last spoke to the chairman of VisitScotland and what matters were discussed. (S3F-2468)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I last spoke to Dr Cantlay on Tuesday 25 May 2010 about homecoming.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the First Minister acknowledge the statutory duties of the chief executive, as VisitScotland's accountable officer, to be responsible for the proper use of public funds? Does he believe that Scottish ministers have been kept informed of any changes that are likely to impact on the strategic direction of VisitScotland, as required by the agency's management status? Will he tell us who, today, is VisitScotland's accountable officer?

The First Minister: The strategic direction is as was laid out in the statement from the tourism minister last week. All of that has been accorded with. I hope that Lewis Macdonald is not seriously suggesting that ministers direct personnel matters at VisitScotland. That is not the job—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: The meeting of Tuesday 25 May was actually a press conference at which Dr Cantley and I announced the independent research into homecoming Scotland 2009. It showed that homecoming generated £53.7 million of additional tourism revenue for Scotland—22 per cent above target. That is an example of the strategic direction that was set by ministers and which is proving to be an extraordinary success, despite the carping criticism throughout of Lewis Macdonald.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Given that success, does not it seem a bit strange that VisitScotland seems to be intent on sacking its chief executive? Will the First Minister now answer the questions that we tried to get answered last week? Which ministers discussed the future of the chief executive with the chairman of VisitScotland before his appointment, during the appointment process or since his appointment? We did not get

clear answers to our questions last week. We need those clear answers.

The First Minister: Other ministers answered that last week. As far as I am concerned, I spoke to Dr Cantley on Tuesday 25 May about homecoming. I did so in front of the majority of the Scottish press corps. I was entitled to do that—it was a thoroughly good thing to do. The success of homecoming 2009 is to be welcomed across the chamber. I join Murdo Fraser in hoping that homecoming 2014 will be an even greater success.

Public Sector Staff Bonuses

6. Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government is taking action to restrict the payment of bonuses to the highest-paid staff in the public sector. (S3F-2475)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We are taking action to reduce the maximum bonus that is available to chief executives of public bodies. This year, we are again asking chief executives to waive all or part of any bonus, as many of them agreed to do last year. Within the Scottish Government, performance pay for senior civil service staff has been halved in 2010-11, compared with last year.

Jeremy Purvis: In March, the First Minister told Parliament that reviewing the remuneration packages of the chief executives of quangos would

"give rise to a host of legal problems and, quite possibly, to court challenges."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2010; c 25099.]

In his answer of 7 May to a parliamentary question that I put, John Swinney confirmed that

"Since this administration took office, the Scottish Government has approved reviews for"—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 7 May 2010; S3W-32990.]

19 chief executive posts. Given that those reviews took place under his Administration and that our top three public sector officials were hired under contracts that his Administration issued, will he confirm that none of those people will receive bonuses this year and next?

The First Minister: I am delighted to say that a number of recent new appointments and new posts do not have bonus arrangements. For example, that is the case for Creative Scotland, the Scottish Futures Trust and the Scottish Police Services Authority. I hope that Jeremy Purvis accepts that it is somewhat easier to introduce a no-bonus policy for new appointments and new bodies than it is to try to rewrite contracts that were signed at a time when the Liberal Democrats

were in coalition government with the Labour Party.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I would not wish to push a wages policy on the First Minister, particularly as could not carry one out in any case—he does not have the powers to do so. What will he do to encourage people in the private sector to exercise restraint and to show some sensitivity to the folk who are losing their jobs?

The First Minister: The Government has some powers over wages policy. For example, in the “Public Sector Pay Policy for Staff Pay Remits 2010-11”, we set out the pay parameters for staff in public bodies, limiting basic awards to 1 per cent. It is true that senior staff in the public sector are governed by pay arrangements from Westminster, but there are a variety of pay bodies in the public sector into or on which the Scottish Government has a strong input or impact. I join Margo MacDonald in saying that, in the toughest imaginable times to come, people throughout the public and private sector will have to show restraint in terms of their wages. I support the view that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the largest burden.

12:29

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Finance and Sustainable Growth

Fossil Fuel Levy

1. Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in releasing the funds that have accumulated under the fossil fuel levy. (S3O-10909)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The United Kingdom Government has given a commitment to

“review the control and use of accumulated and future revenues from the Fossil Fuel Levy in Scotland.”

The Scottish Government continues to work with UK Government ministers and officials to agree a resolution to the issue to ensure that the levy is released for investment in renewable energy in a way that is additional to the Scottish budget.

Gil Paterson: Has the cabinet secretary calculated the impact on the Scottish economy and the number of jobs that could be created if the fund was repatriated to Scotland?

John Swinney: I have not made the precise calculation to which Mr Paterson refers, but I can say that the advantage of the fossil fuel levy and the real imperative for us to secure access to the resources in a fashion that is additional to the Scottish budget is that it would enable us to pursue what is widely appreciated throughout the Parliament to be the enormous opportunity in the potential of renewable energy in Scotland.

The Government has made a number of preparations to ensure that we are well placed to support the development of the renewables industry. Much of that work is formulated around the “National Renewables Infrastructure Plan”, which is an ambitious plan that we hope will not only attract support through the fossil fuel levy resources but capture resources from the private sector, which would observe the Government’s significant investment in this activity.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Like other members of the Parliament, I have many constituents who applied for support under the boiler scrappage scheme and were disappointed to learn that it was oversubscribed in just 36 hours. In the event that funds from the fossil fuel levy are released, will the Government consider using some of them to

extend the boiler scrappage scheme, which has clearly been both popular and successful?

John Swinney: I hear Mr Scott's concerns on behalf of his constituents. Statute is clear that we must use the resources from the fossil fuel levy only for investment in renewable energy. That is the test for investment that would have to be applied, and any investments would have to be made against that particular benchmark. However, I will of course consider the issue that Mr Scott has raised.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the funding of infrastructure requirements associated with renewable energy may well meet those criteria, even though they are not directly involved in the generation of electricity? If that is the case, how will the cabinet secretary undertake consultation on the use of any such funds with those who have an interest in ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place throughout Scotland?

John Swinney: That is an aspiration to which we would all subscribe. We must have in place the appropriate infrastructure to ensure that Scotland can retain the leadership that it has in many areas of renewable activity—that is the case particularly in wave and tidal activity, but we are in an exceptionally strong position on offshore wind into the bargain. It is essential that the infrastructure that we put in place meets all the demands and requirements.

The “National Renewables Infrastructure Plan” has been developed on the Government's behalf by Scottish Enterprise. There has been wide consultation in the sector on the components and interventions that would make a difference. We will continue that dialogue, and if we have a successful outcome to the current discussions with the UK Government on the fossil fuel levy we will be able to utilise the base of consultation that has been undertaken already and which will be taken further forward in the event of our being successful in accessing the resources.

Libraries (Book Contract)

2. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will reconsider its decision to centralise the book contract for public and school libraries, given concerns expressed by small publishers, librarians and principal teachers. (S3O-10860)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The tendering exercise is being conducted by Scotland Excel, acting on behalf of all the local authorities that are its members. The Scottish Government is not a decision maker on this contract.

Des McNulty: But the Scottish Executive has overall responsibility for the Scottish economy and is, as far as I understand it, in charge of educational policy. It cannot be good for Scotland for small book publishers to be placed at risk and for librarians, particularly school librarians, to lose direct access to local companies that currently provide them with books. Can the Scottish Government really do nothing whatever to remedy a situation that is directly affecting jobs and services for people in Scotland?

John Swinney: I acknowledge members' concerns about this issue; Mr McNulty has written to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and other members have written to me. As I said in my answer, which was not meant to be evasive in any way, the Government is not the decision maker on the contract—Scotland Excel is taking forward this procurement—but within the boundaries of what I am able to say about this, I can tell the chamber that I am advised that in this area of activity about 75 per cent of existing supplies of books are delivered by companies that are outwith Scotland and not of the character that Mr McNulty referred to in his question. They are not small, local, Scottish publishers. I am advised, therefore, that the focus of the tender is on delivering greater value for the 75 per cent of annual expenditure that currently flows through wholesalers based outside Scotland. The other 25 per cent of the market—or £2 million-worth of supplies per annum—that is made up of specialist titles will in no way be affected by this tender. In other words, Scottish providers and suppliers should not be affected by these developments.

That is the information of which I have been advised. I have discussed the issue with Scotland Excel because I feel that, when I receive a number of letters of this nature from MSPs, it becomes incumbent on me to do so. The organisation is midway through a procurement exercise and has assured me that the concerns that have been raised will be properly and fully addressed once the tendering process and procurement procedure are complete.

West Lothian Council (Transport)

3. Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met representatives of West Lothian Council to discuss transport issues. (S3O-10861)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish Government's senior bus development adviser met representatives of West Lothian Council on 28 April 2010 to discuss various aspects of the provision of local bus services in West Lothian.

Mary Mulligan: When I spoke to West Lothian Council officials recently, they were unable to confirm what Scottish National Party councillors in Falkirk were telling local hauliers, which was that the Scottish Government was about to provide finance for the Avon gorge crossing to be started and completed. Will the minister confirm that that is the case? If not, when is he likely to make such an announcement?

Stewart Stevenson: I recognise that Falkirk Council and West Lothian Council have for quite a long time been carrying out very substantial work on this matter. The priorities of the current roads programme in the strategic transport projects review are clear and we will consider the A801 upgrade and other measures promoting access to Grangemouth in particular as we consider future spending reviews.

Scottish Executive Staff Bonuses

4. Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how much was paid to its core departmental staff in bonuses in 2008-09. (S3O-10924)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): During the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009, performance payments totalling £1,887,514 were paid to staff in the Scottish Government's core directorates. The payments were made on a taxable, non-consolidated and non-pensionable basis.

Iain Smith: I wonder whether the cabinet secretary can clarify the Government's policy on staff bonuses with regard to its pay policy over the next two years. Does it or does it not believe that bonuses should be paid to staff?

John Swinney: The Government has established its pay policy for the current year—2010-11. The Government's approach is designed to constrain significantly public sector pay. That has been clear as each year of the Administration's term has gone by—our policy has constrained public sector pay.

Mr Smith asks me to set out the approach in the forthcoming period. I will do that in due course, once the information that I require to form that view is to hand from the comprehensive spending review later this year. I expect constraints in public sector pay policy to continue. That will be part of the Government's approach to managing the difficult financial situation that we face.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has made it known to those who receive bonuses that he would like them to waive their bonuses. Some chief executives have said that they will do so. Will he give us a progress report on whether other chief

executives and others who receive such bonuses have told him that they will waive their bonuses for next year?

John Swinney: The question that Mr Smith lodged was on a different subject—bonuses in the core Government. I certainly have not invited to waive their bonuses the members of staff who are affected here and whom I can approach to do so, because the bonuses to which I referred in my first answer are paid to a combination of staff in the core Government and members of the senior civil service, whose pay policy and bonus approach are controlled by the United Kingdom Government's Cabinet Office.

Mr Whitton raises the position of non-departmental public body chief executives. Several chief executives have responded positively to my request that they waive bonus awards that have been made to them. As for future years, we have reiterated our request for chief executives to waive their awards. That will depend entirely on whether bonuses are awarded. We must await performance assessments before I can give Mr Whitton a definitive answer, but I will of course be happy to update Parliament on those points when the information is to hand.

Economic Recovery Plan (Construction Industry)

5. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultations it has had with the construction industry and how it plans to incorporate the needs of this sector into its economic recovery plan. (S3O-10851)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): In the past two years, we have kept in close touch with the construction sector through the Scottish construction forum and its member organisations. I receive from the forum regular detailed briefings on activity throughout the sector. The Minister for Housing and Communities also regularly meets Homes for Scotland. In the context of our economic recovery plan, we are supporting construction by continuing to invest in infrastructure, social housing and skills and training.

Marilyn Livingstone: The cabinet secretary is aware of the construction industry's drive for the Government to focus on linking public procurement to training, which he mentioned. Will he ensure that that policy is implemented?

The cabinet secretary is aware of the contribution that local economic forums make throughout Scotland. Will he commit to working with key stakeholders in Fife and throughout Scotland to ensure that these construction forums continue sustainably?

John Swinney: I acknowledge Marilyn Livingstone's long-standing interest in the construction industry's work. I assure her that the concept of community benefit and deploying that to create training obligations and commitments for construction companies and developers will be very much part of the Government's procurement approach. We would be delighted to receive from Marilyn Livingstone suggestions for elements of that approach that the Government should develop in particular.

Marilyn Livingstone's second point was about local economic forums. It is important to ensure that public authorities understand the issues, concerns, aspirations and challenges of those in our business sectors. I encourage such dialogue to take place regularly.

Marilyn Livingstone: On a point of order, Presiding Officer—well, it is more a point of clarification: I said local construction forums.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): What progress has the Government made on providing construction contractors with a common prequalification procedure for public contracts?

John Swinney: I will correct myself: I misheard Marilyn Livingstone on local construction forums. I will certainly ensure that there is regular dialogue with the industry because it is essential to understand many of the challenges and aspirations that exist.

On Nigel Don's point in relation to—

Nigel Don: Prequalification.

John Swinney: Thank you for that. The first part of the work towards that was to provide greater structure to public procurement through the public contracts Scotland website, which has been up and running for more than a year. The next part of that work is to ensure that, when companies register on public contracts Scotland, they are able to register financial and other data on a pre-contract qualification basis to ensure that they do not have to provide the same information every time that they apply for a public sector contract. We expect that work to be complete during this calendar year. It will represent a significant enhancement of the services that are available to individual companies when tendering for public sector contracts.

Manufacturing Sector

6. Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the growth of the manufacturing sector. (S3O-10907)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government provides a wide range of support to manufacturing

companies. That support is delivered through Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Development International, local authorities and Skills Development Scotland.

On 26 May 2010, the First Minister signed a new manufacturing communiqué with the Scottish Trades Union Congress, providing a clear framework of support and partnership for future work for the sector. The STUC is a key social partner for the Scottish Government, and we continue to work to secure recovery and sustainable economic growth.

In addition, we are committed to supporting all manufacturers in Scotland to improve their productivity and ensure that they can compete globally. The Scottish manufacturing advisory service, which is delivered by Scottish Enterprise throughout Scotland, has grown from strength to strength in doing that.

Christina McKelvie: I am encouraged by the partnership working that the Scottish Government has undertaken with the STUC on the issue. Although its powers in the matter are limited, will the minister confirm that the Scottish Government will make it a priority to do what it can to retain and expand Scotland's manufacturing skills base—such as the expertise that is found at the Philips Lighting plant in Hamilton in my region—and encourage its use as a key driver for securing our economic recovery?

Jim Mather: Absolutely. We consider that to be fundamental. The retention of a strong skills base in Scotland is key to increasing economic growth, international competitiveness and productivity. We are working with the industry to ensure that young people are attracted into careers in engineering, manufacture, science and technology. Philips in Hamilton is an example of a company that is adapting successfully to the changing focus within the industry and working closely with Scottish Enterprise to that end.

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): My colleague Charlie Gordon says how illuminating that answer was on Philips. However, that is another matter entirely.

On the communiqué, I read with interest about the vigorous approach that the Government will adopt on manufacturing. Of course, a key aspect of manufacturing is innovation. Companies that innovate grow twice as fast, traditionally employ more employees and have greater turnover.

I recognise the vigorous support that the Government is offering manufacturing, which is vital to Scotland, but what more can be done on innovation in that sector to ensure that we have such vital companies in Scotland to develop and grow the economy and to recognise the role of

large companies that are in Scotland, as Christina McKelvie's supplementary question did?

Jim Mather: Andy Kerr makes a key point. It is one of the aspects that has come out of the relationship with the Scottish manufacturing advisory service. We can help companies innovate and develop existing products. In addition, we are now creating a better climate, in which academia is more positively involved with our business community. A key example is the Strathclyde institute for operations management in Glasgow where, under Professor Umit Bititci, we now have a good forum for academia and genuine manufacturing to rub shoulders, exchange ideas and come up with an approach that puts Scotland on the path of continuous improvement and continual innovation.

Railway Stations (West of Scotland)

7. Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what financial assistance it provides to improve railway stations in the west of Scotland. (S3O-10908)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Scottish Government provides direct funding for major rail projects, including the west of Scotland rail improvement programme, which has added a new platform at Glasgow Central and is extending platforms for longer trains at stations in Inverclyde and Ayrshire. The Scottish Government also provides support to Strathclyde partnership for transport to enable improvements to be delivered at many rail stations across the west of Scotland, for example at the Partick station interchange. That complements the improvements that were secured from ScotRail through the franchise agreement with the Scottish ministers.

ScotRail is continuing to progress a programme of station improvements that is worth more than £12 million and which includes installation of escalators at Queen Street station, closed-circuit television, upgraded passenger information systems, help points, toilets, regeneration of station buildings, platform shelters, seating and cycle storage facilities.

Stuart McMillan: I have met representatives of groups that are involved in the adopt a station scheme, and have been impressed by their suggestions to reinvigorate and return to their former glory older and more traditional stations in the west of Scotland. Will the minister give an assurance that any public investment via the scheme will guarantee that the historic and architectural significance of the stations will be of paramount importance and that current branding can be adapted using traditional livery styles, thus guaranteeing the traditional appearance while promoting the current organisational branding?

Stewart Stevenson: Scotland's railway infrastructure is a substantial and fine heritage, much of which dates back well over 100 years. In any developments, we would wish to protect the integrity of our historic stations. The adopt a station scheme is successful and is one of a range of interventions to breathe new life into stations throughout Scotland.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I call Jeremy Purvis, but ask him to bear in mind that the question is about the west of Scotland.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Indeed, Presiding Officer. I am grateful.

Does the minister agree that railway stations in the west of Scotland will be improved immeasurably if their passengers can access, without necessarily changing, the Borders and Midlothian through the Borders railway? Passengers in the west of Scotland will be as keen as I am to bring forward the proposed financial closure of the Borders railway project from autumn 2011 to before the next Scottish Parliament elections in the spring of 2011. Can the minister give good cheer to those passengers in the west of Scotland who want to access the Borders by rail sooner?

The Presiding Officer: He cannot really, because the question was about railway stations in the west of Scotland and I do not think that the Borders railway will have any of those.

Stewart Stevenson: I am sure that railway stations in the west of Scotland will provide good cheer to those who will enjoy the services that will be introduced for the Borders when the railway opens there.

Clyde Fastlink

8. Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how much funding it will contribute to the Clyde fastlink project, broken down by amount, financial year and location. (S3O-10845)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The amount and duration of the Scottish Government's financial contribution to the Clyde fastlink project will be determined by the outcome of on-going discussions into the business case and accompanying details of the project, which are being developed by Strathclyde partnership for transport and Glasgow City Council. The Scottish ministers have indicated that they are willing to contribute to an initial phase of the project, which will provide improved connections between the city centre, the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre and the new Southern general hospital.

Charlie Gordon: I thank the minister for that answer, but I find it disappointing. It is the latest of several similar answers on the subject. Given that the Scottish Government started hinting at financial support for Clyde fastlink only when it cancelled the Glasgow airport rail link, is not the Government's real view of fastlink that it is a tactical smokescreen rather than a key transport project?

Stewart Stevenson: I hope that the member will forgive me, but I am certain that I referred to fastlink considerably earlier than he suggests. We follow with keen interest the work of SPT and Glasgow City Council on the subject and we look forward to continuing to engage in that important project.

Microgeneration (Corporate Residential Properties)

9. Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will take action to promote the use of microgeneration technology in corporate residential properties such as care homes. (S3O-10921)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Section 71 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires the Scottish ministers to make provision for permitted development rights for microgeneration in non-domestic buildings by 1 April 2011.

Mike Pringle: New-build corporate residential properties often include microgenerative measures in their construction. That technology not only helps supply power to the properties concerned, but has the potential to allow them to sell power back to the National Grid through the clean energy cashback scheme, to help with upkeep and running costs. However, existing corporate residential properties do not benefit from any assistance that the Scottish Government offers homeowners in installing microgenerative technology. Instead, they often have to rely on commercial loans which, in the words of Friends of the Earth, make

"the rates of return much less attractive".

That has led Friends of the Earth to warn that the green energy cashback scheme will "not be effective".

Does the minister agree that existing corporate residential properties have the potential to be a huge part of the renewables sector? Will he commit to examining that matter further to improve corporate access to the clean energy cashback scheme?

Stewart Stevenson: The property sector, in both its commercial and domestic parts, is a

significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, the Government is undertaking a range of interventions to ensure that we address that issue. In particular, for both commercial and domestic properties, reductions in rates are available when investments are made in a range of energy efficiency or energy-generating investments in buildings. We will continue to look for opportunities. I have listened very carefully to what the member has said.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): The minister will recognise the importance of managing demand in order to reduce costs and carbon emissions in residential homes, as well as of promoting microgeneration. Will ministers consider supporting measures to improve the efficiency of boilers and heating systems in properties of that kind?

Stewart Stevenson: The member will know of our interest in the subject of boilers in the domestic circumstance. We are very interested in ensuring that people understand their energy usage. We are working with energy companies. Intelligent metering is coming along and, of course, there are interesting examples in other countries of giving people access to information from other, similar properties that have intelligent meters, thus enabling them to realise what they can do better. Those are all subjects that we will continue to monitor. We will continue to work with the power industry and property owners.

Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010

10. Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made with the powers given to it under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. (S3O-10878)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 received royal assent on 28 April and the first commencement order was made on 4 June. That order brings creative Scotland into being on 1 July and brings various other provisions, including the order-making powers in part 2 of the act, into force on 1 August. Further provisions will be brought into force later this year.

Derek Brownlee: In view of some of the concerning revelations that we have heard over the past few weeks about Strathclyde partnership for transport, among other public bodies, and its use of public money, will the Government tell us when it intends to bring into force the transparency provisions of the act and when it will start to consider which organisations should be abolished?

John Swinney: We will consult public bodies on draft guidance in relation to publishing duties over the summer, with a view to bringing those new duties into force later this year. Of course the wider issue of the use of the order-making powers remains part of the consideration of ministers. Any proposals will, of course, be announced to Parliament in the proper way.

Scottish Borders Manufacturing Sector

11. Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what measures it has and is continuing to put in place to protect the manufacturing sector in the Scottish Borders. (S3O-10917)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government provides a wide range of support to manufacturing companies in the Borders and across Scotland through Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Borders Council and Skills Development Scotland.

We are committed to supporting all manufacturers in Scotland in improving their productivity through the Scottish manufacturing advisory service.

In recognition of the effectiveness of the targeted approach that has been provided by the Scottish manufacturing advisory service, the Scottish Government has provided additional funding of £11 million over three years from 2009-10 to allow for an expansion of the team. That represents an increase of £3 million over three years and provides for the recruitment of 12 new advisors and associates.

Jim Hume: The minister will be aware of the recent news about some 120 job losses at Peter Scott & Company Ltd in Hawick—another key manufacturing business in the Scottish Borders is in administration. In all my dealings with such firms, access to finance, not lack of orders, is cited as the problem. Can the minister provide definitive answers on when the Scottish investment bank will make funds available to businesses and say exactly what his department is doing to get banks to lend to viable companies in order to prevent horrendous redundancies such as we have seen in the Borders recently?

Jim Mather: I genuinely feel for the people who are involved at Peter Scott. The money will be available through the Scottish investment bank towards the end of this year. I understand from KPMG that it sees positive prospects of finding people to take up and move forward the assets at Peter Scott & Company Ltd. I very much hope that that will come to pass. We have to remember the source of the credit crunch and the reality of the regulatory race to the bottom that caused it and we must look to work together in Scotland to

ensure that we get the very best possible outcomes.

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am aware that the minister is aware of the on-going problem at Peter Scott & Company Ltd in Hawick, which is a manufacturing firm of over 130 years' standing. Like me, the Scottish Government has been in touch with the administrator—indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth has done so. I heard only today from the administrator that thousands of pounds of social and holiday contributions that staff have made appear to be at risk. Will the minister and the Scottish Government exert whatever influence they can to ensure that those funds are reimbursed to these important workers in the manufacturing sector?

Jim Mather: I am very happy to investigate that. Perhaps the member will give me some further information on that. I will certainly put any weight that I can behind it.

Petrol Prices (Rural Areas)

12. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what representations it has made to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury regarding petrol prices in rural areas. (S3O-10865)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth is writing to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to raise a number of issues, including rural fuel prices, which the Scottish Government wishes to see addressed in the UK emergency budget. I hope that the correspondence receives a more favourable response than our letters to the previous UK Government, which consistently rejected any attempt to address the high fuel prices in rural areas.

Peter Peacock: Does the minister share my belief that there is ambiguity in the UK coalition document on its commitment to a pilot discount scheme for petrol prices in rural areas? Has it made that commitment or is it simply going to investigate such a pilot scheme, as seems to be the case? There is, of course, a big difference between the two. If there is to be a pilot scheme, will he support my call for the Highlands and Islands to be a pilot area?

Stewart Stevenson: It is flattering to be expected to respond on behalf of the UK Government. In its manifesto, the Conservative party discussed a fair fuel stabiliser, under which fuel duty would be cut when oil prices rise and vice versa when they fall. In their manifesto, the Liberal Democrats set out that they would introduce a rural fuel discount scheme that would allow a

reduced rate of fuel duty to be paid in remote and rural areas. In contacting and pressuring the new Government, we will hold the members of the coalition to account.

That said, the most recent letter from the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer of 9 April argued that a differential rate of fuel duty in rural areas would offer increased opportunities for fraud, false accounting and smuggling. It also argued that lower duty would increase retailers' margins, not retail prices. The enthusiasm for the measure on the member's party's benches seems to be not particularly marked.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the Scottish Government agree to instruct its enterprise officials to prepare a detailed analysis of how the very high price of motor fuel impacts on the cost of goods and vital services in the most remote areas of Scotland? The detail of such an analysis would reinforce the argument that action must be taken to address the very high cost of motor fuel in areas such as Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross.

Stewart Stevenson: Jamie Stone is absolutely right to focus on the need for objective information to underpin the argument. We will, of course, ensure that we have that information as we pursue this vital interest for many rural areas in Scotland with the new UK Government.

Rail Freight (Grangemouth)

13. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with Transport Scotland regarding the consultation on developing rail freight policy in Scotland, and in particular, the timetable for action to develop the Grangemouth freight hub. (S3O-10866)

The Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): Transport Scotland's on-going work to develop a framework for rail freight policy is carried out in the name of Scottish ministers. I am, of course, kept informed of progress. Transport Scotland, on behalf of Scottish ministers, takes part in discussions, which are led by Falkirk Council, on the Grangemouth freight hub national development. The next meeting will be held in two weeks. Progress in taking forward the Grangemouth freight hub is reported through updates to the national planning framework action programme, which is available on the Scottish Government's website.

Cathy Peattie: Does the minister agree that, given the huge benefits for our climate change programme of taking traffic off our roads, we should give the highest possible priority to ensuring the integration of infrastructure in road, rail and sea freight? Would that present further

opportunities for low-carbon gains, such as the reintroduction of a passenger service at Grangemouth railway station? I would be grateful if that suggestion could be discussed. In combination with a rail freight service to Grangemouth, it could facilitate development of Grangemouth station.

Stewart Stevenson: I share the member's enthusiasm for taking heavy goods vehicle traffic off the roads and transferring it to rail and sea freight. Grangemouth is a key part of the freight infrastructure and is a link between the road and rail networks, in particular. As investment is driven down to Grangemouth through the use of freight, opportunities in relation to passenger traffic will be created. We continue to monitor the position.

End-year Flexibility

14. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what its position is on the use of end-year flexibility. (S3O-10853)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): In the 2007 spending review, the Scottish Government set out its plans to draw down end-year flexibility balances between 2008-09 and 2010-11, in response to the tightest spending review settlement since devolution and taking into account the previous Administration's agreement with the Treasury to draw down £665 million in EYF in 2007-08. The Scottish Government subsequently confirmed its intention to draw down a further £129 million in EYF in 2010-11, to offset in full the cut that arose from the change to the Department of Health capital baseline that was included in the April 2009 UK budget.

Mr McAveety: I thank the cabinet secretary for his well-constructed, but rather opaque, reply. I am reminded of the answer that my granny used to give when I asked her about the mysterious tin on the shelf. She would say, "There's nae need to be reckless, son. You've aye got to put money away for a rainy day." Given our inclement weather, and given that the cabinet secretary has already voraciously consumed £1.5 billion of the reserves that he inherited, how much will be left to deal with any future inclement or rainy days in Scotland?

John Swinney: I always knew that Mr McAveety was constantly drenched by pessimism and all that goes with the inclement weather that he faces. I will bring some sunshine to him, to overcome his gloom. He may have considered my answer to be "opaque". If he thought that that was opaque, he has not yet heard me in full motion on some of the detail.

I will remind Mr McAveety of what has happened on end-year flexibility. When I became

Scotland's finance minister, the previous Administration had committed itself to spend £655 million of end-year flexibility in the financial year 2007-08. If there were ever a cast-iron example of a Government trying to pay its way into an election, that was it. The sum in question was the largest amount of end-year flexibility to be used in any one financial year since 2007-08. I have never been able to spend as much end-year flexibility in one go as the previous Labour and Liberal Administration committed itself to spend: £655 million. Perhaps Mr McAveety and his colleagues, who supported the previous Administration, should have been paying closer attention to the strictures of Mr McAveety's granny before they used end-year flexibility.

Violence Against Men

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-6531, in the name of Alex Neil, on violence against men. We have very little spare time in the debate, so members will need to stick closely to the indicated times.

14:55

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): I start with the strongest message possible that violence against men will not be tolerated under any circumstances by the Scottish Government.

That is not a new message, nor is this the first time that I have said that in the Parliament. Ministers in the previous Administration said the same thing. In nearly every debate that the Parliament has had on domestic abuse, violence against women or forced marriage, the message has been the same: violence, no matter who perpetrates it against whom, is wrong.

In the past we have focused on debating issues to do with the violence that women experience at the hands of some men. On one occasion, we had a members' business debate on domestic abuse services for all victims. However, today—I think for the first time in 11 years—the Parliament debates violence against men, and in particular domestic abuse of men by women or by male partners.

I pay tribute to members who have raised the issue with me and elsewhere. In particular, I pay tribute to the work of Mary Scanlon, from the Tories; John Wilson, from the Scottish National Party; Mike Rumbles, from the Liberal Democrats; and James Kelly, from the Labour Party. I also pay tribute to John Forsyth, who has campaigned on the issue for years.

Of course, men experience many forms of violence. The Scottish ministers have demonstrated their commitment to services for the victims of violence against men through SurvivorScotland's national strategy for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, which was launched in 2005. The national reference group that was established to deliver on the strategy has a range of members, including male survivors. In 2009, services for male survivors were identified as a key priority of the SurvivorScotland strategy. Funding has been allocated to a number of organisations to take forward the development of services for male survivors in Scotland.

I will focus on the serious issue of domestic abuse and the men who experience it. In 2008-09, nearly 8,000 men reported domestic abuse to the police in Scotland. Of those incidents, 7,336 had

been perpetrated by a woman. The number of reports from men of domestic abuse represents 14 per cent of reported domestic abuse incidents in Scotland.

During the past three or four decades, domestic abuse against women has been brought to the forefront of the political agenda and the public's mind—and rightly so. The vast majority of the Scottish population realises that domestic abuse is not acceptable, is a matter of concern and is a problem that needs to be addressed if we are to have a Scotland of which we can all be truly proud.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Has the minister's office had a chance to investigate whether the increase in levels of violence among women that has been noted by the police has fed into the figures that he has given us, to enable the minister to say whether the issue is that there is more violence or that more men are reporting violence?

Alex Neil: We are undertaking a close examination of what is behind the figures. In that respect, I commend the work of Strathclyde Police, which has done an enormous amount under the current chief constable to get a better understanding of the complex relationship between men and women in relation to domestic abuse, and of the number of repeat offenders as well as the number of incidents and who commits them. I will say a word or two later in my speech about repeat offenders.

Because domestic abuse is now better understood and more openly talked about, many services have the knowledge and ability to cope better with either female or male victims. As recently as a decade ago, police officers could be heard saying, "It's just a domestic," when a woman reported domestic abuse, and they would never have considered that a man could be a victim. Today, it is different, and police forces across Scotland are at the forefront of tackling domestic abuse. There are innovations such as the Strathclyde domestic abuse task force, which proactively seeks out repeat offenders and brings them to justice.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): On the issue of—I have forgotten the point. I will sit down. I will come back to the minister.

Alex Neil: Okay. I will allow another intervention from Ms Lamont when she recalls what she was going to ask me.

Some repeat offenders are women, although the majority are men.

Johann Lamont *rose—*

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): She has remembered!

Johann Lamont: It is certainly an affliction for women of a certain age.

The minister referred to the police saying, "It's just a domestic." I accept that part of the point was that the police had no idea that men could be victims of violence in that way. However, surely the serious point was that the police did not regard it as part of their responsibility to do anything about violence inside the home, which was regarded as a private domain and not a matter for anybody else.

Alex Neil: That culture within the police has changed dramatically over the past decade, which is to be commended. For example, Strathclyde Police has been very innovative in the run-up to and immediately after old firm games when, as a direct result of police activity, there has been a 28 per cent reduction in the incidence of domestic abuse, be it against men or women.

Mainstream services provided by organisations such as Victim Support Scotland, health services and local authorities have a responsibility to support all victims of domestic abuse with the same courtesy and understanding. Victim Support, for example, provides practical and emotional support to all victims of crime, including men who experience domestic abuse. It is the largest voluntary organisation addressing the needs of victims in Scotland. In addition, there is now a specialist service providing support to male victims of domestic abuse in Scotland, which I will come on to in just a moment.

It is clear that domestic abuse against a man is just as abhorrent as when a woman is the victim, and the Government is committed to tackling the issue. However, it is also clear that there are differences in the experiences of male and female victims, and in their service needs. One of the benefits of the launch of a specialist helpline is that it will help us to collect the necessary intelligence to enable us to design services for male victims of domestic abuse over a period of time.

The Government recognises that men who experience domestic abuse require a service that is specific to their needs. That is why, in March, with cross-party support, I launched the extension of the men's advice line service to Scotland. The helpline has been funded with £12,000 initially for this year on a pilot basis. The funding came from the equality unit budget and not from money that would otherwise have been used to provide services for women, and it is for one year at present, with the option to continue thereafter. The men's advice line is a confidential, freephone helpline offering emotional support, information and practical advice to male victims of domestic abuse. It will gather information on the number of

callers, the purpose of the calls and what callers' needs are for support services.

It is very early days yet but, in one month alone, the helpline had 21 calls from Scotland, with five of those being from male victims of domestic abuse. If we assume that the same number of calls will be received each month this year, that will be equivalent to a rise of 150 per cent in the number of calls in a year compared with before the launch, despite the fact that publicity material is still being distributed and is still to be made widely available throughout the country. The men's advice line will be an invaluable source of information about male victims in Scotland. We have never previously had the opportunity to gather such in-depth intelligence on the issue.

Margo MacDonald: I apologise for intervening again and thank the minister for taking my intervention.

As the minister may be aware, a petition has been lodged with the Parliament on the need for proper research on the issue of violence. Will he look kindly on that petition, which I do not think would cancel anything that he wants to do?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in his last minute.

Alex Neil: Indeed, I had a meeting yesterday with one of the major movers behind the petition. We are working with them on the issues that the petition identifies.

As I am in my last minute, let me just underline the fact that we believe, on a cross-party basis, that the issue behind today's debate is now being properly addressed. Those efforts in no way undermine or undercut the valuable work that is being done by the violence against women national group or any of the organisations that are associated with that campaign.

There is no doubt in my mind that domestic abuse against men is not only a significant issue in Scotland but a growing problem. It would be a dereliction of duty for us not to recognise that and to respond accordingly. Working with all the other parties in the Parliament, the Government intends to ensure that we tackle head on the problem of domestic abuse against men, like the problem of violence against women, and make significant progress in the years ahead in trying to reverse the very worrying trends of recent years.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that domestic abuse is a very serious and totally unacceptable problem in Scottish society; notes in particular that all victims, whether they be women, men or children, deserve appropriate support, and therefore welcomes the Scottish Government's provision of funding for a support helpline for male victims, which will provide the further information about their needs that is

required before any future decisions about services are made.

15:07

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am happy to contribute to the debate and I thank the minister for his grace in allowing me a second chance when I remembered what I wanted to say the first time—I genuinely appreciated that.

In speaking to the amendment in my name, I should indicate that we would have supported the Tory amendment, in the name of John Lamont, but for the fact that agreeing to it would in fact delete our amendment. Therefore, it will not be possible for us to support the Tory amendment at decision time.

Labour starts from a position that all victims of violence need support. As a society, we need to challenge violence, not tolerate it. When it was in office in the first eight years of this Parliament, Labour's approach was focused, in dealing with violence and crime more generally, on listening to victims, giving them a voice and understanding how they were affected by violence. We focused on how victims were affected by lack of action or support by the agency that should have acted on their behalf and how they felt reporting crime, going through the court process and afterwards. We wrestled with the implications of repeat victimisation and how that can damage the individual and disempower communities when intimidation goes unchecked. At no stage have we sought to silence the voices of any victim, man or woman, in confronting violence. The debate should not be cast as if some people had been somehow wilfully and deliberately excluded because of our approach to violence and justice.

I would argue that such an approach, which involves listening to direct experience, offering support through Victim Support, providing information for victims and so on, and then trying to understand the why of that violence, by looking for patterns and ensuring that those patterns shape policy and action, is central to changing a culture in which violence can blight communities such that victims—male and female—are left feeling helpless.

It is evident that, in taking such an approach, we cannot and should not say that violence happens and that we are all potential victims in a very generalised way. That would take us nowhere. In tackling crime and the causes of crime, it is self-evident that not all causes are the same. Therefore, we need to talk about the way in which violence is experienced, such as the way in which community bullying is used to silence older people and leaves them feeling besieged. We need to understand and speak out against racist attacks, sectarian violence and homophobic bullying and

threats. In all those, victims might be subject to the same weapon of choice, such as a fist, but we will not change matters if we do not look beyond the immediate weapon or wound to an understanding of what drove that fist in the first place.

That is no more evident than in knife crime, in which the overwhelming majority of perpetrators and victims are young men. We owe it to those young men—perpetrators and victims—to address the issue with a gendered analysis so that we can understand what it is about being a young man that makes him more likely to be involved in knife crime. That is what a gendered analysis means.

So it is with domestic abuse. We cannot eradicate it if we look only at the bruises, or if we ask about and understand the what of it, but we do not ask the why. I do not dismiss the concerns and pain of male victims, and I am sure that the helpline will improve our understanding of their experience. Many of those who champion the needs of those victims do so simply because they want those needs to be met.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Will the member take an intervention?

Johann Lamont: I will make my point first. However, we must be alive to the fact that, for some, this is a proxy debate for a far more contentious and perhaps fundamental political argument that seeks to deny the reality of women's inequality in work, opportunities, and life chances. That argument does not accept that male violence against women is a fearful expression and consequence of that inequality.

Mary Scanlon: I have listened carefully to what the member has said. Given that she has listened to all victims since the Parliament started in 1999, why is it that the best support that a male victim in Scotland can get is a telephone helpline in Brighton?

Johann Lamont: I do not accept that representation of what happens to male victims. I have described and characterised how we advanced the rights and interests of victims.

Although the motion talks of support for male victims, and we recognise that, our amendment affirms what has been accepted for a long time, which is that the problem is overwhelmingly one of gender inequality. We affirm that because a gendered analysis of the problem is central to addressing it, not just one point of view among many others. It is a reflection of international agreements and obligations relating to gender inequality and violence against women. There is also international recognition of women's experience of domestic abuse. We know about it from our communities and our surgeries. The police, doctors, housing officers, social workers and schools tell us about the disproportionate

number of women who are victims, and the disproportionate number of men who are perpetrators. That is not to deny one right of a male victim of violence in his own home.

I have a stark statistic that must shape our policy. Of men who are murdered, 5 per cent are murdered by a partner or ex-partner. Of women who are murdered, 44 per cent are murdered by a partner or ex-partner. When anyone asks, "Why did she not leave?" that is the statistic that keeps a woman from going through the door and out of violence because it shows the consequences for so many women when they leave.

I recognise the demand for further research, and I reflect on some of the commentary that we have already that, when men report domestic abuse, there are stark differences. I ought not to have to repeat that I have compassion for all victims of violence, men and women, but there is a difference in the levels of fear and panic that men and women report. When victims are male, a disproportionate number of the perpetrators are also male, and—

Mary Scanlon: Do men not feel pain?

Johann Lamont: I am not saying that anything is okay. We have to understand the problem in order to tackle it.

The argument is put at its gentlest when it says that men do not report because of the stigma and because it is humiliating. I appreciate that that will be a motivating force for some of the men who are caught in such circumstances.

The argument is sometimes more strongly put that the women's lobby and women's organisations are resistant and hostile to the idea that we have a responsibility to men. I rebut that latter argument just as strongly. Women who have been confronted daily by the pain caused by violence are already shaped by compassion and anger about what the abuse of power can do. It is interesting to see how exercised feminists in particular are about antisocial behaviour in our communities, for example, because they understand the abuse of power and powerlessness.

I acknowledge that the issue of stigma strikes a serious chord but, when a man feels that he is stigmatised and humiliated because he suffers violence at the hands of a woman, that confirms that we are all shaped and affected by the gender roles that we are expected to take. Their experience also describes that gender challenge. Women's equality is freedom for men too. The argument confirms the underlying issue of gender inequality and the unacceptable roles that we are expected to take.

We should be clear that domestic abuse is not about poverty or about alcohol; it is about power and the way in which people abuse that power. In some circumstances, it will be women abusing power over the man with whom they live. We must talk about provision, and an assurance about funding for next year would be welcome. We must also talk about protection and recognise the progress that the police have made in acknowledging that the home is not just a private domain. However, crucially, when it comes to prevention, this understanding is central. In speaking to our boys and girls about what a damaging, corrosive problem this is for us all, we must also get them to confront the why—it must never be “just the way things are”.

In conclusion, this is not an argument about resources predicated on some kind of battle of the sexes or some sort of fight for attention between men and women. It is an argument—in the interests of women and men, our daughters and our sons—that, in dealing with the lived experience of domestic abuse, we confront the ideas that trap women with violence and the messages to men that this is what they do and that they are a lesser kind of man if they are the victim of violence at the hands of a woman rather than a man. It is in naming the crime that we expose the inequality and create a fairer, more equal and safer society for us all—men and women.

I move amendment S3M-6531.2, to insert at end:

“, and reaffirms that domestic abuse is rooted in gender inequality, that overwhelmingly victims are women and that eradicating domestic abuse will only succeed where that pattern is acknowledged.”

15:16

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I welcome today's debate on violence against men.

In 2003, during the annual debate on violence against women, my colleague Murdo Fraser asked the then Scottish Executive when it intended to bring forward a debate on violence against men. As much as I welcome today's debate, and I am pleased to be able to take part, I am saddened and ashamed that it has taken seven years for the Parliament to recognise this as an issue that needs to be discussed.

It is important to recognise that abuse or violence by one person against another, regardless of the relationship or sex, is always unacceptable. Domestic violence must be one of the worst violations of trust, in which someone turns what should be a loving and caring relationship and makes it perverse, creating a

situation where someone feels torn between their love and the pain that is being inflicted on them.

Nobody is in any doubt that the majority of victims of domestic abuse are female: 85 per cent of those who were victims of domestic abuse in Scotland in 2008-09 were, indeed, female and it is vital that we continue to support and work with those that provide services to women who find themselves living in abusive and violent relationships.

Christine Grahame: It would be helpful if John Lamont gave us the source of those percentages. Were those reported cases?

John Lamont: Indeed, they are the reported cases. Sorry—in 85 per cent of reported cases of domestic violence, the victim was female.

However, that does not mean that we should ignore other groups who find themselves victims purely because they are in a minority. Male victims of domestic violence may be a minority, but it is a growing minority and one that is growing rapidly. More and more men are coming forward as victims of domestic violence. As the minister stated in his opening remarks, in 2008-09 just under 8,000 incidents of domestic abuse in which the victim was male were recorded. That represents an increase, since 2000-01, of 175 per cent, which is an incredible increase and a shocking number of incidents. Fifteen per cent of domestic abuse incidents report a male victim—that figure is too high, and too high to continue to ignore.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Do the member's statistics show how many of those were counter-allegations?

John Lamont: I do not have those figures to hand. However, the point that I am making is that it is not just a matter of members of one sex being the victims of domestic violence. Both sexes are affected—they are not affected to the same extent, but there is a growing problem that is affecting male victims, which the Parliament has to recognise.

It is disappointing that there is an annual increase in the number of incidents that occur. We should question whether that is due partly to an increased feeling of confidence about reporting such events. If that is so, we should perhaps be relieved that people who are living in such abusive relationships feel able to come forward and seek help. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of males who have reported domestic abuse. If that is due to better reporting, that should perhaps be welcomed. I welcome it for two reasons: first, because of the bravery that is shown by these men and any victim who tries to break the vicious circle that they have found themselves in; and, secondly, because it shows

that stereotypes and stigmas are finally starting to be broken.

In 2008-09, 57 per cent of domestic abuse incidents that were recorded by the police involved a victim who had previously been abused. That is why it is vital that we do everything that we can to encourage victims to come forward, regardless of sex, and support them in making a change.

The other part of the debate concerns the fact that support has not been made available to male victims of domestic abuse in the same way that it has been for female victims. To follow that point through, does that mean that there has been inadequate provision for female domestic abuse offenders, compared with that which has been in place for males? That is a point that Mary Scanlon raised when the Public Petitions Committee considered this issue.

The Scottish Conservatives are not calling for funding to be withdrawn from services that provide security and support for female victims of domestic abuse, but we can no longer ignore the prevalence of violence against men and not address it.

Much of the support that is available for domestic abuse victims is targeted at meeting the needs of female victims, because they are the majority and because those who are subjected to domestic abuse require a specific sort of help. However, that latter point also applies to males. The figures show that 43 per cent of men said that their most recent experience of physical domestic abuse was

“just something that happens”,

in comparison with 14 per cent of women who felt the same way. That percentage of women is far too high, but it is unacceptable, in a modern society, for 43 per cent of male victims to believe that.

I hope that I have gone some way towards dispelling the myth that seems to persist in some parts of this Parliament that, in supporting provisions that provide help for male victims of domestic abuse, we are in some way not supportive of the provision of support for female victims. That is simply nonsense. That argument does not work the other way round, it does not work on any other topic and it should not be allowed to work on this issue, either.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to supply funding for the men's advice line helpline. I especially welcome the Government's commitment to collect statistics and information. Now that we all, quite clearly, recognise this as a problem, if we are to tackle it efficiently and effectively, we need to have a better understanding of what we are dealing with.

I hope that the Scottish Government and other parties can support our amendment, which will enable us to come to a better understanding of the scope of the problem that Scotland faces and how best to address it. I am disappointed in the amendment in the name of Johann Lamont. Frankly, she seems to be fighting the battles of yesterday when this debate has moved on.

I move amendment S3M-6531.1, to leave out from fourth “that” to end and insert:

“, and requires the Scottish Government to report back to the Parliament with further details on the information collected and what action it plans to take before any future decisions about services are made.”

15:23

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I am pleased to be opening this debate for the Liberal Democrats. Almost 11 years ago, in a debate on 27 October 1999, I first raised the issue of the need to debate the problem of domestic violence against men. The annual debates that we have had since then have focused on the issue of men's violence against women. Although that is important, until now—with the arrival in government of Alex Neil—this Parliament has been negligent in highlighting women's violence against men.

I do not like history being rewritten. During the period of the previous coalition Government, I was dumbfounded when the Executive repeatedly refused to entertain the idea that we should have a debate on this issue, let alone do anything practical to help the victims of women's violence against men. I had several meetings with Labour ministers to that end. I thought that any reasonable person would understand that the victims of domestic violence should be assisted. I could not believe it when the minister responsible—I will spare her from identification—told me that there was no need for a debate because it was not an issue, that it was a so-called gender issue and that resources would be wasted if they were misdirected to help a small number of male victims rather than a much larger number of female victims.

In responding to me in the debate in October 1999, Johann Lamont said:

“If there were significant evidence of women's violence against men, the first place it would be seen is in the development of self-help organisations.”—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1999; c 38.]

She was in denial of the problem in that debate, and I note from today's debate that she is in denial of the problem now. I was disappointed to hear her say on the radio this morning that many of the male victims are perpetrators themselves.

Johann Lamont: That is true.

Mike Rumbles: I was going to say that she did not have the courage to say that in this debate, but she has just nodded and said that it is true. I thought that we had consigned those prejudices to the dustbin, but obviously not.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: No, I will not.

Despite not being able to persuade Labour ministers even to debate the issue, I was able to get a members' business debate on it, which has already been mentioned, on 2 December 2004. My motion read:

"That the Parliament recognises the very serious and totally unacceptable problem of domestic violence in Scottish society; notes in particular that all victims, whether they be women, men or children, need to be supported, and therefore considers that the Scottish Executive should provide practical help and assistance to all such victims."

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: No, thank you.

I would like to thank in particular Mary Scanlon and Alex Neil for supporting my motion. Not one member of the Labour Party could bring themselves to support it.

Bill Butler: Will the member give way?

Mike Rumbles: No, I will not. The member had his chance. For 11 years, he has had a chance.

Whenever campaigners fight for justice, they have to overcome prejudice and ignorance.

Johann Lamont: You do not have to tell me that.

Mike Rumbles: We do, unfortunately, Johann.

Petitioners have come forward to ask MSPs to lend a hand in standing up for the victims of domestic abuse. That means all victims of domestic abuse and not just some. I have had both men and women victims of domestic abuse in tears in my advice surgeries, each with their terrible problems, asking for help. Across the benches in the Parliament, we are all aware of the problems that are associated with men's violence against women, but some are unaware of or choose to ignore the problems of women's violence against men. That has held up any practical help for victims.

The victims of women's violence against men seem to have to face an added burden. They are often disbelieved when they come forward. They face an extra problem because of the stigma that is attached to the issue. Male victims have told me that, when they summoned up the courage to call the police, because of assumptions that were made the police automatically arrested them. Imagine that—the victim was arrested. That added

further insult to the real injury to the person who called for help. We need to change those perceptions. Would it not be helpful to all the male victims of domestic abuse to see even one advert on television in which their situation was depicted? I ask the minister to consider that.

After 11 years of asking, I am delighted with the appointment of Alex Neil as the responsible minister. We now have someone who is committed to addressing the issue. Whatever the political differences between us—there are many—I take the opportunity to commend Alex Neil for his courage and his commitment in coming to the aid of all victims of domestic abuse, whether male or female.

I hope that we will all see the evil of domestic abuse for what it is—an evil that is perpetrated on the weaker member of a relationship. It is not a gender issue. If we treat it as such, no progress will be made in tackling its true evil. Members should not continue with the mistake of saying that it is simply a gender issue. It is about the abuse of one person in a relationship by their partner. Once we recognise that, we might at last get on the right track and have a chance of helping all those victims who really do need our help.

15:29

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I declare an interest. I am a board member of Rape Crisis Scotland and a member of the cross-party group on men's violence against women and children. I make it clear that I am speaking for myself and not on behalf of either of those organisations.

Any violence, whether in the home or in the street, must be tackled. Those who cause violence must be dealt with by the authorities and the courts. Equally, all those who are at the wrong end of abuse need our support. It is therefore easy for me to back plans to provide a helpline to support men who are the victims of domestic abuse.

I want to inform members why I am very much involved in highlighting the plight of women and children at the hands of men. I cannot recall when I last heard that a woman had been raped by another woman or sexually assaulted by a female partner. No doubt that happens—I am sure about that—but it is rare. On the other hand, tens of thousands of women do not even report offences by men, whether they are rapes or serious assaults, because they believe that if they do they will be seen at best as not credible and at worst as the cause of the attack. They believe that because of bad information that they have received about cases that failed because of issues that were irrelevant to the merits of the case, such as sexual

history, what the woman was wearing and whether she had been drinking.

The ratio of men to women who abuse—particularly sexually abuse—children is massively geared towards men being the abusers. Paedophilia is almost exclusive to men, although I admit that, in some high-profile cases that have involved children who have been sexually abused, the sex rings that have carried out that abuse have included women.

The point that I am trying to make is that there is still massive ignorance about the problems that women and children face from violent men, and that most violence against men is carried out by men. We still have not reached into the consciousness of male society to get men to be proactive in not accepting violence that is carried out by men. The levels of condemnation that are required to make the difference in attitudes to male violence have not been reached. I contrast that with the condemnation of drink driving and the stigma that is attached to it. The public have got the message on drink driving.

The police and any accident and emergency department member of staff will tell us about the aftermath of Celtic versus Rangers football matches. People who have been injured by violent men are there for all to see in hospitals. The hidden part of that is that some supporters of the beaten team will be monsters who take out their frustrations and take revenge on their own families. That is why there is a spike in domestic abuse incidents at such times. Women and children wait for their turn to be abused just because the man's team has lost. I therefore welcome the initiative, but the message should also be given that we should not take our eyes off the ball of men's violence against women and children. Far more women and children are abused and assaulted by men.

In June 2009, Professor Marianne Hester of the University of Bristol published a paper entitled "Who Does What to Whom? Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators", which demonstrated that there were significant differences between men and women as domestic violence perpetrators. Men are much more likely to be repeat offenders. She said:

"the intensity and severity of violence and abusive behaviours from the men was much more extreme. This is also reflected in the nature of the violence used ... Men's violence tended to create a context of fear and related to that, control. This was not similarly the case where women were perpetrators."

The fact that men also suffer from domestic abuse should not be a signal to those whom we have been working to convince over the years that we have a real problem with male violence against women and children that we can somehow take

our foot off the gas in expressing that, and that those in power who are dealing with the matter can take their foot off the gas.

When the cross-party group on men's violence against women and children was set up, I was the convener. I was asked, not in a friendly manner but in a threatening manner, why the title did not also contain the words "violence against men by women". As far as I was concerned, at least 70 per cent of domestic abuse was caused by men and, if we could have a 10 per cent reduction in that, it would be significant progress. If others had wanted to set up a group to deal with the other forms of domestic abuse, they would have got my full and unreserved support and blessing, but my focus was on the 70 per cent, and it still is. Nevertheless, I fully support the Government's positive step to tackle violence against men. It is worth while and will assist the men who need our support, and I give that today.

15:35

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): I rise to support the amendment in the name of my colleague, Johann Lamont.

The subject of this afternoon's debate is, as the Government's motion describes it, a

"very serious and totally unacceptable problem in Scottish society".

Domestic abuse, whether physical or psychological, is always abhorrent. Scottish Labour, along with, I am sure, all or certainly most members across the chamber believes that domestic abuse is never a legitimate form of behaviour. As a response to a situation, it is beyond the pale, regardless of the gender of the victim.

No thinking person could have anything but sympathy with male victims of domestic abuse at the hands of female perpetrators. The most recent statistics show that such incidents account for 14 per cent of incidents of domestic abuse reported to the police in 2008-09.

It is unquestionably the case that Scotland has a significant problem with domestic abuse. For instance, 53,881 incidents of domestic abuse were reported in 2008-09, compared with 49,655 recorded incidents in 2007-08. That constitutes an 8 per cent increase, which in itself is part of a steady rise in incidents reported since 2000-01.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): Does the member believe that the particular problem that Scotland evidently has with domestic abuse may have something to do in part with the problem that Scotland has with alcohol?

Bill Butler: There is no doubt that alcohol is part of the problem—I accept that—but how we deal with it is a question for another debate.

I want to say one last thing about the statistics. Given that there is thought still to be an underreporting of domestic abuse, the recent figures are alarming and point to a problem that obviously is widespread.

Behind the cold statistics lies the human cost. There is clear evidence that the likelihood of the abuse of a child taking place is substantially higher when domestic violence is the norm within the household. It is also beyond dispute that domestic violence has a profoundly damaging impact on children. Whether they witness incidents directly or live in a home where it occurs, domestic abuse has a terrible negative impact on children. It scars them emotionally and psychologically.

Scottish Labour believes that male victims of violence should have the appropriate support. Let me make it very clear that my party abhors domestic violence in all its manifestations. We agree, along with organisations such as White Ribbon Scotland, that

“the launch of the men’s advice line in Scotland is an important step”.

That is why we have no problem with the content of the Scottish Government’s motion as long as the amendment in the name of Johann Lamont is accepted. It is an important and necessary amendment because, if accepted, it will ensure that this Parliament’s approach to the serious matter of domestic abuse is both balanced and proportionate. There is no doubt that male victims of violence should have support that complements but does not detract from the continuing struggle against violence against women—a pattern of unacceptable behaviour that is rooted in gender inequality.

According to the Home Office British crime survey for 2004-05 and the homicide statistics for 2006-07, women form the majority of the victims of sexual assaults, threats, physical violence and chronic long-term violence. We must always keep that indisputable fact to the fore in seeking to reach a rational consensus on the approach that we should adopt to deal constructively with this serious social problem.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Bill Butler: Not at the moment.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge the importance of context and responses. Gil Paterson referred to a 2009 study by Marianne Hester of the University of Bristol, which said that

“Men and women tend to use and/or experience violence and describe it in different ways”.

In effect,

“When women use violence in intimate relationships it is often, though not always, in self defence or defence of a child or as a form of resistance.”

In that context, it should also be noted that the Respect briefing paper states:

“A significant number of men calling the Men’s Advice Line who initially identify as victims change their own identification by the end of the call or provide information about the violence in their relationships which strongly suggests that they are either not a victim or in fact are the perpetrator.”

Mike Rumbles: Shameful.

Bill Butler: This is no laughing matter, Mr Rumbles.

I accept that both men and women can be victims of domestic violence and abuse. Violence in relationships, in all its forms, is to be abhorred, and appropriate support must be on offer in all circumstances. Nevertheless, our approach must be balanced and evidence based if it is to be constructive and effective. Labour’s amendment makes it clear that women are overwhelmingly more likely than men to be the victims of domestic violence in general, to experience sexual assault and threats in particular, to experience domestic violence in the long term and to be injured or killed by—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member’s time is up. He must stop.

15:42

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank the Scottish Government and the business managers for agreeing to hold the debate—the first on domestic violence against men in 11 years of the Scottish Parliament. I also welcome to the public gallery the petitioner Alison Waugh. I thank Alex Neil for listening to those who have campaigned on the issue for a long time and for funding a helpline for male victims of domestic abuse. Like others, I would have preferred the helpline to be in Scotland, and I would have been even more pleased had there been any services for male victims in Scotland to which the helpline could refer callers. I also thank Mike Rumbles for his first-class, excellent speech, as well as John Wilson, with whom I have worked on the issue for some years. Finally, I thank Paul Martin for being the bravest man in the Labour ranks and coming along to the launch of the helpline on behalf of the Labour Party. To every male victim and associated child in Scotland, I say that Labour is not listening to you. According to Labour, men feel no pain.

Bill Butler: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: No, sorry.

Although we constantly talk about violence against women—and now men—we should not forget the children who are often caught in the crossfire of exchanges. Where there is help for women, there is also, rightly, help and support for their children, as well as opportunities for the male perpetrators to address their anger management and other issues. However, when the perpetrator is female, there is no help with anger management, because in Scotland there is no recognition of the fact that women can be the perpetrators. Neither is there help for the male victims or their children. That cannot and should not continue. As I stated in the debate on violence against women, no one is claiming that the resources that are allocated to support female victims and their children should be challenged or, indeed, reduced; we are asking only for a level playing field and social justice for male victims.

Data from the Scottish crime and justice survey from September 2009 highlighted in the *Scotland on Sunday* "Spectrum" magazine showed that, in the preceding 12 months, young men aged 16 to 24 experienced physical and/or psychological abuse more often than young women and more often than any other demographic group. The survey also revealed that 48 per cent of perpetrators of partner abuse are male and that 45 per cent are female. Police came to know about 35 per cent of incidents of partner abuse that women experienced in the preceding 12 months but about only 8 per cent of incidents in which the man was on the receiving end. Forty per cent of men told no one about incidents, compared with 21 per cent of women who told no one.

As other members have said, it is a fact that 14 per cent of incidents that the police record are against men and that 85 per cent are against women. However, since 2001, the previous Executive and the Government have spent £100 million on services for women and their children and £28,000 on male victims.

The evidence that male victims gave to the Public Petitions Committee was highly emotive and compelling. The petition from Alison Waugh and Jackie Walls is not unreasonable. They call only for fairness, justice and equality, to ensure that the needs of male victims and their children are met. In Scotland, they should expect no less.

The abuse need not end when the man leaves the house. Abused fathers and their children are far more likely to experience attempts to end meaningful contact between them after a family break-up. That might not be considered abuse, but denying any parent the right to see their child is the height of abuse.

I welcome the helpline, but questions still need to be asked. Why was no tender for the helpline issued? Instead, the Scottish Domestic Abuse

Helpline, which is for female victims, and the men's advice line in London were asked to submit proposals. The latter was awarded the contract.

The children of male victims are still waiting to be acknowledged, let alone helped. Since the publication of "Boys allowed", the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has counselled 58,311 boys. That figure has more than doubled in five years. That happened because the NSPCC overhauled its training for call handlers and advertised to win boys' confidence.

As the minister acknowledged, more still has to be done to publicise the male helpline. A lack of publicity might result in few calls, which could be used as a reason to halt funding. I hope that today's long-awaited debate will ensure that all victims and all children who suffer through domestic violence are given the support and care that they need and deserve in a modern and compassionate Scotland.

15:48

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government's debate on male victims of violence. The issue of violence against men has been sidelined for far too long. No matter what men's domestic situation is, it is vital that male victims of violence are given a voice to highlight the lack of availability of support services. Until recently, no specialist services to tackle domestic violence against men were established in Scotland.

For some time, I have worked with colleagues around the chamber, such as Mary Scanlon MSP, to raise awareness of male victims of domestic violence and to ensure that services are provided that meet their needs.

Evidence in recent years has shown an increase in the number of male victims of domestic violence. Figures on partner abuse from the 2008-09 Scottish crime and justice survey demonstrated that in cases in which partner abuse had been experienced since the victim turned 16, 38 per cent of offenders were females. The survey also estimated that only 8 per cent of men who suffered domestic violence reported it. That goes to the heart of the underreporting of domestic violence.

Despite the reported increases, services and campaigns have been targeted at women who experience violence, on the basis of statistical evidence that more cases involve female victims and male perpetrators. That basis is true, but it is wrong to deny that male victims of domestic violence have suffered from a lack of targeted support services in Scotland.

Female victims of domestic violence have women's refuges and can seek support from Scottish Women's Aid, but similar support is not available to men. Violence is violence and clearly is unacceptable in a modern Scotland, no matter whether it comes from a male or female perpetrator.

Elaine Smith: I do not think that anyone would disagree with the last point that John Wilson made. However, is he in denial that domestic abuse is predominantly rooted in gender inequality?

John Wilson: I am not in denial that domestic abuse takes place. The problem is that the gender-based analysis leans the debate in one direction against another.

Although the majority of victims of domestic violence are women, to say that they are the overwhelming majority, as Johann Lamont's amendment does, is misguided. The UK Statistics Authority reviewed the evidence in 2008, following a query raised by Parity regarding the use of the phrase

"the overwhelming majority of victims are women"

in a consultation document issued by the Crown Prosecution Service on its policy for prosecuting cases of domestic abuse. Following the review, the UK Statistics Authority concluded that the evidence did not justify the use of the phrase and, consequently, the CPS removed it from its document.

The developments in services and increased funding targeted at female victims have been vital, essential and have benefited thousands of women. However, providing similar services to male victims of violence in the home would ensure that all victims of such violence are catered for with the vital services that they desperately require.

The Scottish Government has recently taken a small but significant step to provide a service to male victims. On 17 April this year, the men's advice line was extended to cover Scotland, as well as operating in England and Wales, as was the Respect helpline, which aims to assist perpetrators of domestic abuse in changing their behaviour. However, much more needs to be done to ensure that male victims are provided locally with services that meet their needs and, importantly, that mainstream services that regularly come into contact with victims of domestic violence—such as the police, social work, housing, health and victim support—are trained to recognise the needs of male victims as well. The role of local authorities and how people normally present through social work services are important factors that need to be acted upon at ground level.

The issue was brought before the Public Petitions Committee by two petitioners—Alison Waugh and Jackie Walls—who seek to ensure that all publicly funded action, including campaigns, projects and training programmes, are adapted to acknowledge fully the needs of male victims of violence and their children. Once again, the Public Petitions Committee has allowed an important issue to be raised at committee level.

At present, too many agencies that were established to assist victims and vulnerable people in domestic violence situations fail to recognise men as victims of such violence. Training and services tend to adopt a gendered approach, reflecting higher reporting by female victims. That approach has a negative knock-on effect, in that it reinforces the proposition that only women can be victims of domestic violence while assuming that generalised services will meet the needs of male victims. For example, I was concerned by the written response that the Public Petitions Committee received from the social work services at the City of Edinburgh Council. It seemed to suggest that women who acknowledged using violence did so for reasons of

"self defence ... pent up feelings of anger and frustration"

or a desire

"to precipitate a violent assault against themselves".

A number of issues have been raised during the debate and we must recognise the problem. Strathclyde Police made a step in the right direction in its recent domestic abuse campaign "Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Scared to go home?", which featured men and women on the posters.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I have to stop the member. His time is up.

15:54

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): In supporting the amendment in the name of Johann Lamont, I agree that violence against anyone is deeply wrong and that the emotional and physical pain and trauma caused by domestic abuse blight the lives of men, women and children throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom. Services and support should be available to all victims of domestic abuse and, of course, the male victims may be in gay, as well as heterosexual, relationships. However, we need to recognise that the experiences and needs of men and women may be different.

That is why a gendered analysis of domestic abuse that seeks to understand the context, meaning and impact of violence and how it affects men and women differently is vital in ensuring that the right support is available to all who need it.

That is consistent with the gender equality duty, which requires that we recognise the different needs and experiences of men and women in all aspects of life. Therefore, a gender-neutral approach to domestic abuse would be to the detriment of all victims. Crucially, as our amendment states, that means recognising that domestic abuse

“is rooted in gender inequality”.

It is reflective of the unequal power relations that continue to exist between men and women, the unequal pay structures and working conditions that exist and the value, or lack of value, that we place on women’s roles in every way in everyday life. Male violence against women is a profound societal and cultural problem that is rooted in social relations, rather than just the psychopathology of individual men. It is not possible to give a similar analysis of female violence against men.

Margo MacDonald: I do not disagree with a word that the member has said, but does he concede that we are undergoing a cultural change, in that more women are more violent and there are now statistics to show that?

Malcolm Chisholm: That is certainly a problem—I do not deny that.

What depresses me about many of the speeches is that, although we all support the helpline, some members, although not all, emphasise female violence against men as a way of rejecting the analysis that I have outlined. That analysis has been central to my politics for the past 20 years, starting with the zero tolerance campaign, which began in Edinburgh. That campaign taught many men and reminded many women—and perhaps taught some women who had not realised it—that the inequalities and power relations between men and women are the underlying reasons that drive male violence against women.

As our amendment says, we must recognise that pattern of violence. There is a depressing pattern of male violence against women, which is reflected in, and in some cases encouraged by, many cultural portrayals. I note for example the recent spate of films about violence against women, including the appalling “The Killer Inside Me”, which I certainly will not go and see. It represents profound societal forces that explain male violence against women and do not in any way cover the different issue of female violence against men.

Because of all that, the level and severity of violence against women is disproportionate to that experienced by men. Despite a small increase in the number of cases of reported female perpetrators, the vast majority of recorded cases—

a figure of 85 per cent was agreed by John Lamont—still involve a male perpetrator and a female victim. According to Scottish Women’s Aid, at least one in five women in Scotland will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. Not only that but, as Professor Marianne Hester of the University of Bristol recently showed in her important study that I hope all members will read entitled “Who Does What to Whom: Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators”, the intensity and severity of violent and abusive behaviour that is perpetrated by men is “much more extreme”. She found that men are

“significantly more likely than women to use physical violence, threats, and harassment”

and that that is frequently used to create an atmosphere of fear and of control over their victim.

Professor Hester also refers to other studies. That is relevant to what Mike Rumbles said, so I will briefly quote two bits. She states:

“In addition, a systematic review of the literature”—

so this is not based only on Professor Hester’s study—

“has found that men may be over-reporting instances of being victims of domestic violence while at the same time being perpetrators of domestic violence.”

Neither Professor Hester nor I say that that explains all the figures by any means, but it explains some of them.

The report also states:

“Within this context it has been found that women, in particular, may use ‘violent resistance’ against violent male partners. Echoing this, women’s use of violence has been found in a number of studies to be defensive or retaliatory rather than initiating.”

That is not to deny the cases in which that is not the case, but we must see the issue in context. Several members have taken the issue out of context and are getting it out of proportion.

Research from Canada that can be found on the White Ribbon Scotland website compared violence that is committed by women and men and showed that victims of male violence are five times more likely to require medical attention. Members will find many more examples if they go to that website. Women are also far more likely than men to be subject to multiple incidents of abuse and to be victims of sexual violence. According to research that was commissioned by the Home Office, 32 per cent of women who had ever experienced domestic violence did so at least four or five times, compared with 11 per cent of men. Moreover, 54 per cent of rapes in the UK are committed by a woman’s current or former partner. That is not to trivialise the horrific experience that some men go through at the hands of a partner, but it exemplifies why a gendered approach to

domestic abuse continues to be important. As Scottish Women's Aid has pointed out, such an approach is necessary to meet our obligations under international agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

I support the amendment in Johann Lamont's name.

16:00

Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD): Domestic abuse is totally unacceptable whether the perpetrator or the victim is male or female. The number of incidents of domestic abuse in Scotland is frankly appalling. There were more than 50,000 in 2008-09, each one of which represents a human life in turmoil. As the minister quite rightly said earlier, 8,000 men reporting domestic abuse in Scotland—14 per cent of the total—is not an insignificant number.

In many cases, domestic abuse will not be reported to the police. In fact, the number of cases will be way higher than the number reported. We can only imagine what is going on “behind closed doors.”

Make no mistake: domestic abuse is a crime, whether it is physical or psychological. We need to help victims have the confidence to seek help. They need to know that help is there and that they will be believed. People should not accept this crime as part of life—they should not have to live with domestic abuse under any circumstances.

According to the 2008-09 Scottish crime and justice survey module on partner abuse, men are less likely than women to view abuse as a crime or to see themselves as a victim of domestic abuse. That might have influenced their decision not to inform police. Unfortunately, they are more likely to consider physical or psychological abuse as just something that happens to them. That is not acceptable. They should not be living in fear of the next incident—that destroys lives across the country, and not just victims' lives but their families' lives.

Many men choose not to report this crime for whatever reason, whether the stigma attached to it or the fear of the authorities not believing them. The female attacker often makes counter claims to the police that they are the victim. The assumption is often made that the man is the perpetrator and the woman is the victim. The true scale of the problem for male victims of women's violence is hidden, which makes it very hard to deal with.

Johann Lamont: That is quite a significant shift from the Liberal Democrats' position in the past. What does Jim Tolson estimate is the actual proportion of men and women victims? How

hidden does he think the problem of male victims is? Does he think that absolutely equal numbers of men and women are victims of domestic abuse?

Jim Tolson: If we want to see any shift in position here today, we should all be looking at Johann Lamont.

I have incidents of male domestic abuse brought to me by constituents. Such incidents have seen couples separate, divorce, get together again and then split when the violence re-emerges.

Scotland has developed an international reputation for its work on violence against women and domestic abuse in particular. It is vital that that work continues to be driven forward. Ministers must also tackle the underlying contributory factors in domestic abuse, such as drug and alcohol misuse. Cultural change is needed to stamp out the issue.

In January, petitioners, including one of my constituents, Jackie Walls, called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urge an overhaul of publicly funded action on domestic abuse to acknowledge fully the extent to which men are at the receiving end and to address the needs of male victims and their children. Miss Walls first came to me nearly three years ago to seek help in setting up a self-help group for male victims of domestic abuse. Unfortunately, at that time, the Government washed its hands of the matter. As my colleague Mike Rumbles has said, the current minister seems to take a very different view and I, too, commend him for that.

The enormous increase in the number of incidents of domestic abuse over the years reflects the higher level of reporting of the crime from both sexes. An increasing number of male victims are now speaking out.

The figures from 2000-01 to 2008-09 confirm that there has been an increase of 143 per cent in the number of reported incidents that involve male victims. The fact that men are now reporting incidents is a welcome cultural shift, but the stigma is still there. That must change through education and increased support for male victims of abuse. We need ways in which to tackle violence against men. We need to ensure that the victims have confidence in the system. They need to believe that reporting the crime will help them and their families and that real, practical help is readily available. I strongly urge the minister and the Government to take the matter seriously; referring male victims of domestic abuse to groups such as Scottish Women's Aid is simply not suitable.

I am not suggesting that help for male victims of domestic abuse has to be on the scale of that for female victims. That said, men face different issues—issues that need recognition. There is a need for specific help for male victims and their

children who have to flee the mental and physical torture of a relationship. As many members including my colleague Mike Rumbles said, the issue has not been debated over 11 years of the Parliament. It needs to be sorted out and dealt with sooner rather than later. There is a serious and totally unacceptable problem of domestic violence in Scotland and Scottish society. All victims of this crime need support.

16:06

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I commend Mike Rumbles for his dogged commitment to the issue over 11 years. I also commend my second favourite committee, the Public Petitions Committee—which I consider a second home—for its thoughtful discussion with witnesses when considering the petition on male victims of domestic violence. I have read the *Official Report* of the committee's considerations and view the contributions with interest and regard. Indeed, as Bill Butler said at that session and repeated today:

"Domestic abuse is domestic abuse is domestic abuse."—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 26 January 2010; c 2337]

That said, like other members, I make it unequivocally clear that nothing that I say in the debate reduces my regard for those who challenge violence against women in all its forms and those who, over the 11 years of the Parliament, have campaigned to reduce abuse against women, particular in the domestic setting. I saw direct evidence of that in my former profession as a court lawyer who specialised in family matters. I have spoken about that in other debates in the chamber.

I want to move on from the prevailing and, in my view, unhelpful gender divide to an agenda of policies, publicity and practical assistance that recognises that all victims of domestic violence require equivalent—though perhaps not the same—support, and to the implementation of that agenda.

I do not want to play the numbers game. As John Forsyth said in his evidence to the Public Petitions Committee,

"There should not be a competition between victims."—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 26 January 2010; c 2332.]

I will endeavour to say little on the subject, save to comment on the evidence in the 2008-09 Scottish crime and justice survey module on partner abuse. I distinguish the evidence in that document from that which we have from reported cases. Based on a random survey of 16,000 adults aged over 16, conducted through face-to-face interviews in their homes, it is clear that

"In the majority of cases, where partner abuse was experienced since the age of 16, the gender of any abusive partner was male (60%) compared with 38% ... female."

I hope that that addresses, in part, the point that Johann Lamont raised in her intervention on Mr Tolson.

Of course, the figures do not chime with public perception. Therefore, the situation of male victims is not reflected in our treatment or recognition of abused men. We need to recognise that there are abused men, and that their number is growing. The same research exposed the situation of those who did not report abuse. It found that 21 per cent of women did not tell anyone and that the figure rose to 40 per cent for men. We need not guess why; we need only quote Mr B's evidence to the Public Petitions Committee. He said:

"I never had anybody to speak to. The subject was embarrassing and I did not want to speak to my friends or family about it. Domestic abuse just did not happen to men."—[*Official Report, Public Petitions Committee*, 26 January 2010; c 2336.]

How does the perceived reality and not the reality itself translate into our interventions, policies and how agencies deal day to day with domestic violence? I will reprise some of Mike Rumbles's concerns. When police are called to a domestic and they are in doubt about the perpetrator, who do they identify as the victim and who as the perpetrator? Who is presumed guilty until proven innocent? In our television ads, who is always depicted as the victim? Have we ever seen even one advert that recognises that, just occasionally, the victim might be a man? When our children are taught to respect one another, do our teachers recognise that domestic abuse can be a two-way street? The consequences of a wrongful, prejudged intervention can be substantial, because the presumption that the man is always the perpetrator can and often does lead to a chain of events that are almost impossible to reverse: loss of contact with children, loss of employment and loss of home. The TV and poster ads that children see reinforce the view that only women are victims, so the public perception is reinforced in our policies.

The consequences of and fallout from domestic abuse for all victims are severe: fear, anxiety and psychological as well as physical injury, with loss of self-worth and self-respect. It breaks the body and the spirit, and inflicts damage that can last decades and poison relationships with children and subsequent partners. It does not matter whether the victim is a man or a woman.

How do I know that? I quote a male victim, who said:

"I find it painful that the Scottish Government has funded a series of TV ads for Christmases highlighting the

awfulness of domestic violence in which every example is of male violence against women.

It hurts to see messages on buses that men are violent and women are victims. Not a hint that it can ever be the other way. I have no sympathy for men who assault a wife or partner. But I object to my own experience being disregarded.

It's not just the violence that hurts. It's the confidence that was destroyed and has never come back. It's the knowledge that the policy makers don't want to know. You are on your own."

I recognise that there has been some movement, including from Labour members, but we still have an awfully long way to go. If we insist that this is a gender issue, we do a grave disservice to all victims of domestic violence.

16:12

James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this afternoon's debate. I rise to support the amendment in Johann Lamont's name. It is important to recognise the issue of violence against men and that 14 per cent of domestic assaults are against men.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

James Kelly: I would like to make some progress. Labour condemns all assaults against men, women and children. They are unacceptable and should not occur in a civilised society. However, we must look at the total picture. Although 14 per cent of domestic assaults are against men, the vast majority—84 per cent—are against women.

Margo MacDonald, Christine Grahame and others mentioned the importance of getting the reported statistics right and the failure of people to come forward. Christine Grahame stated that 40 per cent of men and 21 per cent of women do not report incidents. Even using those figures, 6,000 additional women and 3,000 additional men would be added to the pool, if we start from a base of 46,000 assaults against women and 8,000 assaults against men. That leads us to the logical conclusion that the vast majority of assaults are against women, which influences the debate. I acknowledge absolutely that there are assaults against men and that the issue must be addressed. That is being done through the helpline. However, the logical position is that the greater number of domestic assaults are against women.

Christine Grahame: Will the member address the issue that I raised in relation to the majority of abusers? I said that men were the abusers in 60 per cent of cases and women in 38 per cent of cases—I think that that is what I said; I am trying to find the figures. The figures come from the

Scottish crime and justice survey and do not reflect reported cases. Does the member accept the statistics?

James Kelly: I accept that there is a general issue about crime statistics, given the number of violent incidents that are recorded in comparison with the 38 per cent figure in the Scottish crime and justice survey. There is an issue to do with getting the statistics right.

We need to consider and understand the causes of domestic violence. It is worrying and disappointing for all parties that in the devolution years, during which we have spent more money on services in health, education and justice, reported incidents of domestic abuse have gone up from just more than 49,000 to nearly 54,000. Analysis of the causes of domestic violence is a complex process, but the media have a job to do in relation to the role models that are promoted. As Johann Lamont said, there is a cultural issue. The world cup is coming up, and footballers are often promoted as role models in the media. I am a football supporter, but I have to say that all too often footballers behave inappropriately. Sometimes a footballer has ended up in the courts after an incident. It is little wonder that young men behave inappropriately. The issue to do with the media must be tackled.

We must also ensure that we can have confidence in the criminal justice system. Rape prosecutions are at their lowest level for 25 years, so it is clear that there is an issue that must be tackled. I welcome Rhoda Grant's work on her proposal for a member's bill on civil protection orders and access to justice, which would tackle issues to do with domestic abuse by men and women.

The introduction of a presumption against short-term sentences, which is proposed in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill, would not help us to tackle domestic abuse. Some 93 per cent of sentences in domestic abuse cases are for less than six months, but if the bill were passed the perpetrators in such cases would not go to prison but be released into the community. The proposal is flawed and the SNP should think again.

Many key issues have been raised in the debate, which we must understand. I acknowledge the issue to do with violence against men, but, as Gil Paterson said in his thoughtful speech, we must acknowledge that domestic abuse affects more women than men. We must make progress on the issue so that we can bring safety and stability to the lives of men, women and children throughout Scotland.

16:18

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am slightly disappointed by the confrontational nature of the debate, given that there is so much on which we all ought to agree. Alex Neil talked about the unacceptability of all domestic abuse and domestic violence, as did pretty much every member who has spoken. Domestic abuse and domestic violence are always wrong, in all circumstances. Members of all parties can agree on that.

I used to work as a youth worker, supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people, so I can testify to the wide range of experiences of domestic abuse and violence that young people, as well as adults, experience in domestic relationships of all kinds. I think that members of all parties acknowledge that, too.

We can also all agree that there have been big and welcome improvements over the years in the legislation and in services such as policing, social work, family support and victim support. The new helpline represents not day 1 of a new agenda but the next appropriate and reasonable step in the gradual improvement of the way in which we deal with all the issues. We can and have all welcomed that.

However, we should also all recognise that there is a good reason why we have traditionally brought debates to the chamber that focus on violence against women. It is centrally important to recognise that there is long-standing and deep-seated inequality in our society, particularly gender inequality, which underpins a huge amount of domestic violence and abuse, and that the problem of such abuse has to be understood in gender terms, no matter who the victim is, if it is to be fully understood both in scale and in nature. It is also important to stress that those who have advocated for many years the gendered analysis have never sought to undermine or ignore male victims of situations that are not posed in terms of male violence against women. The briefings that all members have received from the organisations that have advocated that gendered position make that clear.

I welcome and endorse much of Johann Lamont's emphasis on seeing this debate in complementary terms and not setting one group of victims against another. Her explanation of the relevance of the gendered analysis to issues for young men—for example, the ways in which they experience, engage in and relate to violence—was absolutely spot on. However, I sometimes disagree with Labour's specific proposals on issues such as minimum sentencing, which I think risk doing more harm than good. It does not help, from a gendered point of view, if we take a frightened wee boy and turn him out of prison a

few months later with him convinced that he is a hard wee man.

I want to make a point about domestic violence and abuse in same-sex relationships and say why the gendered analysis is relevant to those situations. Such circumstances are often cited by those who argue against a specific gendered analysis of the issue, which in the view of some people mistakenly sees or recognises only male violence against women. I have been working in the Parliament for about seven years, so it is a while since I have professionally supported or counselled people in same-sex relationships who experience violence or abuse. However, I have to say that I do not remember a single case where the experience of working with those people did not bring up issues around internalised homophobia: the ugly but all too common phenomenon of people turning society's homophobia and prejudice inward and against themselves or their partners. Where does that homophobia come from? Where does it originate? Very clearly, I would argue, it originates in the social and cultural enforcement and policing of gender roles, and in global terms a relatively modern and western binary model of gender that ultimately is delusional. The gendered analysis is therefore absolutely crucial, no matter who the victim is, and is always relevant to women and to men in mixed-sex relationships or any relationships.

Scottish Women's Aid, which is one of the organisations that have advocated that position, states:

"A gender based analysis of domestic abuse is not just about defining 'who does what to whom' and it does not assume that abusers are always men and victims always women. It seeks to understand the context, meaning and impact of the abuse and how the abuse of individual men and women impacts differently on women, as a group, and men, as a group."

I think that all members in the chamber should be able to support that and agree with it.

It would be wrong for the Parliament to agree a motion that implied or stated that some victims were unimportant or should not be offered support, but it would be equally wrong to agree a motion that had nothing to say about the gendered aspects of domestic abuse and domestic violence. I will therefore be very happy to support Johann Lamont's amendment. Mike Rumbles earlier passionately argued—I know that he is sincere about this—that this is not simply a gender issue. Well, of course it is not—gender is not simple and the gender inequalities in our society are not simple. This is complexly a gender issue. We must agree on the vital need for support and justice no matter who the victim is. However, we must also recognise that the gendered aspects of the issue are central, no matter who the victim is, and we

should reflect that in the motion by agreeing the Labour amendment.

16:24

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): Rising at number 14 in the batting list—that would be a strange game of cricket—I am conscious that much has already been well said and probably repeated. Therefore, I will pick up just a few issues rather than try to give a comprehensive review of all the issues involved.

Returning first to the point about statistics—I apologise for doing this, but we need to nail it—I want to pick up where John Wilson left off. In correspondence between the UK Statistics Authority's Professor Jowell and Keir Starmer QC, the Statistics Authority acknowledges that, from the statistics that are available in the UK, we should not say that the "overwhelming majority" of victims are women. It is quite clear, even to the UK Statistics Authority, that there are a significant number of male victims, which is why the UK Statistics Authority has removed that phrase. I ask other people to do so, too, because I think that such language skews the argument just a little too far in one direction.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Nigel Don: Forgive me, but there are a few things that I want to cover.

Of course, that does not alter the fact that the experience of female victims is very different from the experience of male victims. Walking down the street, one sees an awful lot of black eyes on ladies' faces and, by and large, victims who are men do not suffer from broken bones. Clearly, violence against women is an issue. However, in terms of pure numbers, we need to be careful not to imagine that quite as much domestic violence is in the direction of women as one might have thought.

In addition, I want to refer to some statistical information from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has attempted to do some research on domestic abuse. The CDC's findings state:

"Each year, women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner related physical assaults and rapes. Men are the victims of about 2.9 million intimate partner related physical assaults."

That is over a third of those that could be established. I suggest that that might turn out to be somewhere nearer the right kind of proportion, although I acknowledge that the outcome for male and female victims will be very different.

I have to agree with Patrick Harvie that domestic abuse is a complex gender issue, but that does not alter the fact that it is a gender issue.

Therefore, I can only try to draw together what Mike Rumbles said and what Patrick Harvie and Johann Lamont said by saying, "Look, guys, I think that you are actually talking about the same thing." Gender issues are involved, because women's experience and men's experience of domestic violence are different. Clearly, we recognise—I hope that we recognise—that men have a position in our society that is generally one of power and women, generally speaking, suffer as a consequence. Surely, however, there is also a power analysis. Given that the matter depends entirely on the power within the relationship, it does not follow that the woman is the unpowerful one. I think that we can all see that, so we should not fall out over it, but there have been some slightly intemperate comments one way or another that worry me and that we could perhaps just see off.

As one of the final speakers in the debate I want to highlight something that has not previously been mentioned, which is how public authorities say that they deal with the issue. In a letter to me, the Lord Advocate stressed that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service takes all allegations of domestic abuse very seriously, whether the victim is male or female. In the view of procurators fiscal, there will be no presumptions in their analysis of any case. Clearly, they need to take the information that they are provided with, but it is clear that the Lord Advocate believes that there is no gender analysis at her end of proceedings.

Christine Grahame: I am glad that Nigel Don has made a distinction between the Crown Office and the police. I have every sympathy for the police who deal with situations in which there is doubt, but the problem is that a presumption is exercised in situations in which there is doubt.

Nigel Don: Christine Grahame is a fraction ahead of me there. I also spoke to Grampian Police, which is quite clear that its view would now be the same in recognising that there is such a thing as a male victim of domestic abuse. The police now try to be even-handed—those are my words, not theirs—but whether that was the position historically is an issue that I will leave members to contemplate. However, that is now where at least Grampian Police is.

By contrast, the response that I received from Aberdeen City Council—I do not want to pick out a particular local authority, although other members have done so—quoted research that suggests that, in 93 per cent of cases, domestic abuse is committed by a male perpetrator. The statistics that it was prepared to quote were the court statistics, which shows that public authorities are not looking over a terribly wide area and they see the easy statistics that come from the court rather than what is behind them. From that, I draw the

conclusion that, although we might be beginning to gain some understanding, and although some parts of public authority, such as the police and the Lord Advocate, have got there, I am not convinced that every other public authority understands that there might be two sides to the coin, and that they need to be careful about what they are doing.

16:30

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): It has been an interesting afternoon in the chamber. I got the impression that we were having two debates. The one that was generated by the Labour Party ranks was, quite rightly, about the extent of violence against women, while the rest of us seemed to be debating services for male victims. That was reflected in some of the rather heated exchanges that took place and the figures that were banded about.

As Mike Rumbles said, this is the first time in 11 years that the subject has been debated in the chamber, and that is very disappointing. Johann Lamont made many interesting and important points and, in his usual considered way, Nigel Don widened our understanding of those points.

We are talking about the why of domestic violence. However we want to phrase it, there is no doubt that men and women are wired differently and that they react to different situations in different ways, for good or for ill. We need to analyse what goes on, and our analysis needs to go beyond the simple numerical calculation that there are more women victims of domestic violence. The numerical argument becomes about whether more women are using the service because it is there, and men now have a service so more of them are beginning to use it. Does the presence of the service increase the need for it, or does the need for a service create its presence? The debate has become a bit like that, and it is difficult to get behind the issues.

Patrick Harvie: Does the member agree that it would be possible and constructive to move beyond the numerical debate about imbalances in the numbers of victims if everyone here was willing to admit and accept the numerical reality, which does not seem to be what is happening?

Hugh O'Donnell: There needs to be a wider analysis of what is happening. Nigel Don expanded on that during his contribution. We need to get beyond the numerical stuff.

In her contribution to the debate, Elaine Smith made a telling point about tit-for-tat reporting. I have anecdotal evidence from members of the police forces of cases in which, when they are called to a domestic incident, they see people trying to get their defence in first by saying, "They

hit me first" or, "They shouted at me first," whichever gender the person happens to be. That can skew the production of the figures. We are not particularly good at dealing with such circumstances. In the past, the police tended to say that the male was responsible. Perhaps they do so in the present.

Elaine Smith: I point out that I asked my question during an intervention, rather than a contribution. I have spoken on the issue on many occasions over the years, so I thought that I would let my male colleagues speak this afternoon. However, we need more research into counter-allegations. Perhaps the police could provide that information.

Hugh O'Donnell: What happens now is that the word of the initiator of the call is taken. We must find a way of getting round that tit-for-tat allegation to get some balance and a wider understanding of what is going on, as Patrick Harvie said.

Alex Neil rightly mentioned the responsibility of all the agencies to support all victims of domestic abuse. It is fair to say that the role models that we provide to show our males what our society wants them to be might hinder their ability to put their hand up and say, "Hang on a minute—I am being abused." Notwithstanding the valuable, important and useful work that is being done by Women's Aid and by Victim Support, the stigma—or even the perception of stigma—might make that difficult for them. The helpline, albeit a small step, is a step forward in delivering some sort of parity in access to services.

We must go beyond the exchange of statistics. Notwithstanding the way in which they are used, they do not tell the full story. That is where the debate should move forward. Patrick Harvie was the only member who spoke in a broader sense about the issues around same-sex relationships, although Malcolm Chisholm mentioned the matter in passing. That is something else that needs to be completely investigated.

It was rather disappointing to hear members bandy figures about in what appeared to me to be two separate debates. We must move on from that and, as Johann Lamont says, improve our understanding of why domestic violence happens in our society.

16:37

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): On one view, this debate can be encapsulated by the opening comments that many members made. Bill Butler, the minister and Jim Tolson all said that violence is unacceptable, no matter who is the perpetrator or who is the victim. I think that we can all agree on that.

It is a pity that the debate has become a trifle polarised, because it is not a gender issue. When we seek to condemn violence and try to draw attention to the plight of victims of any particular group, that does not mean that our condemnation of those who commit violence against other groups is any less, nor does it mean that our sympathy with any other group of victims is any less.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: Let me finish this point.

When members in this chamber properly lodge motions condemning, for example, the attack on the mercy ship bound for Gaza and expressing considerable sympathy for the people of Gaza, that does not mean that they are any less condemnatory of the attacks by the Hutus on the Tutsi in Rwanda and the terrible atrocities that the victims there suffered. There can be no hierarchy of victims.

Margo MacDonald: When we talk about the gender element in all of this, I think that we are talking about the unequal power relationship, and I think that that is changing culturally. I would like to see an investigation of that and its impact on violence in the domestic setting.

Bill Aitken: There may well be merit in that proposal but I think that that is an argument for another day.

I frankly concede that the majority of offenders are men and that the majority of victims are women. James Kelly gave certain statistics in that respect, which I am sure will be pretty accurate, as his figures usually are. However, an analysis of the available figures demonstrates that the majority is not quite as overwhelming as many—including me—may have thought.

Nigel Don was correct to refer, briefly, to correspondence from the UK Statistics Authority to the director of public prosecutions down south. I will also refer to it, because I think that it is particularly important. On the basis of a complaint, the UK Statistics Authority carried out an investigation, which is summed up by one paragraph in the letter from Professor Sir Roger Jowell, who is the authority's deputy chair, to the DPP. He states that a document that had been issued was incorrect and required clarification, in that

"It would appear that whilst the Home Office evidence does point to a majority of victims being women, the phrase 'overwhelming majority' is not justified in this context."

This week, in the House of Commons, an interesting maiden speech was given by Nicola Blackwood. Having researched the matter, she suggested that domestic abuse accounts for 16 per cent of violent crimes and affects one in four

women and one in six men. She has clearly done her homework, and I think that those figures should concern us all.

Basically, however, we should be applying our minds and our not inconsiderable intellects—which I have seen demonstrated during this debate, which has featured many thoughtful and positive speeches—to the question of what we can do to make things better. I agree with James Kelly that the presumption against short prison sentences will not help. However, I think that certain things that the minister has brought forward most certainly will.

It is important that there should be a change of language. An acknowledgement of that is reflected in the Government's motion and in the fact that we are having this debate.

Another serious issue, which was highlighted by Mike Rumbles and Christine Grahame, concerns the police and their reaction to domestic violence. However, the issue is not quite as simple as was claimed by those speakers. I suggest that we put ourselves in the position of a Glasgow police officer who has come to a house on the basis of a 999 call from neighbours who have heard a disturbance and sounds of violence. Before us are a man and a woman, both showing signs of having been in a struggle, with red marks on their faces and arms. Both have been drinking, and there are two or three young children in the house. The police face a real danger in that situation. The police can warn them, which might not be appropriate, or they can take someone away. In those circumstances, what would we do? Would we leave the children in the house without the woman present, or would we arrest the man? It is so much easier to let the fiscal sort it out, once the matter has been reported, and to let the court sort it out, if the prosecution runs.

Christine Grahame: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: I have no time—I am sorry.

The police are between a rock and a hard place in the situation that I describe. If they take the woman away, there is the problem of the children. If they leave the man in the house and something terrible happens, and there is a history of violence, the police will be in trouble. However, the fact is that, in an exaggerated situation in which the woman is totally responsible, taking the man away sends a terrible message to the children that their mother can assault their father, phone the police, and their father can get the jail. That is a very difficult situation.

16:43

Johann Lamont: I intended my contribution to be a serious one, and I hope that that is how it came over. I wanted to say things that some people might not agree with, but I genuinely wanted to engage with what I think is a serious debate. Although Hugh O'Donnell suggested that the debate was polarised, I was trying to put in context the experience of individual victims of domestic abuse, in relation to policy.

I am a bit concerned about some of the comments that were made about my attitude and the attitude of my party. Mary Scanlon talked about the impact on children and seemed to suggest that my position is that we should discriminate against the children of male, rather than female, victims. That is simply not true. Pioneering work was done by the previous Executive and continues to be done to support those who want to work with children—boys and girls—who have lived with domestic abuse. Children are not screened out because it was a man who complained that he was a victim of female abuse.

Mary Scanlon also conflated a separate issue, which is our capacity to reach out to boys who witness domestic abuse. It is simply not true that I do not want those boys' voices to be heard. Indeed, I have been vocal over many years in attacking the lazy analysis that there is a circle of violence whereby boys who witness violence will go on to be violent men. I have been vocal in condemning that approach because I have worked with young boys and I know adult males who have lived in households where there was domestic abuse. They tell us that it is to their abiding shame that they could not protect their mothers, and they do not know what to do because of that.

The idea that Labour members would support a policy that did not give voice to those boys or that we would not recognise that, whatever the situation, there is a critical role in addressing children's needs is frankly offensive. Members should reflect on that. Regardless of the other issues, we should all welcome the progress that we made in addressing children's needs and recognising that dimension.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: I ask the member to let me make this point first.

John Wilson said that violence is violence. That might be true, but on one level it is also meaningless. We have to reflect on the fact that there are serious arguments on, for example, provocation. In cases of murder, men have been able to go to court and argue that they had been nagged incessantly and, in a heated moment, had killed their wife. We know that there are examples

of men in those circumstances who secured a reduced sentence.

John Wilson: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: I ask the member to let me finish the point.

Meanwhile, women who murdered their husbands and planned it because they were living in fear went to jail. I do not necessarily say that, in the individual circumstances, all those women should have gone free, but we have to accept that there is a serious argument around provocation.

Somebody mentioned that contact is sometimes abused by women, who use it against fathers. I absolutely accept that point. In my constituency, I have worked with fathers and fought for them to have access to their children. However, we also have to understand that there are men who abuse the contact system, according to women's organisations, to continue the abuse of the women. It is not a simple issue of men and women.

In none of the debate have I denied that violence is perpetrated in homes by men and by women, but when we are talking about domestic abuse, in order to move from the particular to the general, as Malcolm Chisholm said, we have to understand the context in which we live and the context of power. Individual power relationships will be different, but the pattern of power relationships is one of men having power over women. That is recognised in the United Nations declaration on the elimination of violence against women, which acknowledges and confirms the basic tenet

"that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men".

To believe that is not to gainsay the experience of individual men.

Margo MacDonald: Does the member agree that that traditional power balance might be upset if women become more violent in their behaviour? We might be at that stage of development just now.

Johann Lamont: One thing on which we can all agree is that we need more research in the area. I accept that the role of women in society has changed. I celebrate that. I contend that it has not brought more violence, because men, whose roles have changed and who are now more likely than ever to be a proper father to their children and take responsibility for them, are less likely to be in violent relationships. We should recognise and celebrate that.

I commend Gil Paterson for his speech. He said something that is quite difficult to say—that, while

we recognise that male victims exist, we have a responsibility to address the bigger picture. That is not about ignoring the individual but about, in policy terms, understanding the broader message that we need to take out to our children in schools. It is frustrating that simply to identify the pattern is to be accused of diminishing people's experience. That is not what is intended.

I thought that, in the debate, we would hear that there is a flaw and a failure in the system because we do not recognise the exceptional. Many people who talk about the hidden problem of male victims of domestic abuse say that such abuse is exceptional but that we should nevertheless address it. However, things have shifted for some people, and the debate is, as I have said, a proxy for something else: the contention that there is no pattern of abuse or that males abusing their power over women through domestic abuse is not an overwhelming or serious problem. However, that problem is recognised internationally and by all our agencies.

Christine Grahame, for example, said that she would always commend those who have championed the rights of women. She should listen to women's organisations. They are anxious that we are shifting from one position, which is that there may be male victims, to a different position, which is that there is no gendered approach. That is important. She said that if we insist that the issue is a gender issue, we do harm to all victims. Labour contends that if we do not understand that there is a gender issue—for women and for men—we will not eradicate it. It is a fact that men feel stigmatised because they are not prepared to be macho and violent. There has to be an impact on them as well, because of that.

One might have thought that the state invented and created women's organisations and refuges, but they came out of needs. I promise members—and this is absolutely true—that Labour members will change our minds on any issue if needs emerge. It is not about our having a closed mind and being in denial. If we accept that there is a scourge and a challenge, we must consider the pattern and the context. Doing so is in the interests of our boys and our girls.

16:51

Alex Neil: The debate has been entirely justified, and we have heard a number of thoughtful and interesting speeches from across the chamber, as Bill Aitken said. I will try in the time that I have to answer as many as possible of the specific questions that were put to me.

I have taken two lessons from the debate. First, the complexity of domestic violence and domestic abuse is even greater than I originally expected.

Secondly, we still lack enough knowledge of and intelligence about the nature and scale of the problem. I will give two examples. Much of the debate has been about the statistics. It is interesting that 85 per cent of all reported domestic violence incidents in Scotland are incidents against women, and 14 to 15 per cent—the balance—are against men. However, as Christine Grahame said, there are different figures in the Scottish crime and justice survey. The incidents are still predominantly of violence against women as opposed to men, but the ratio is 60:40 instead of 85:15. We need to do much more to get behind those figures and get a far better understanding of what is happening. I think that we all agree that all policies should be based on the available evidence, and we need much more evidence to inform future policy.

It is not just about the statistics; it is also about the qualitative analysis of the evidence. Some of the questions that have been posed are fair, and they apply on both sides. What is the cause of many incidents of domestic abuse and violence? We do not yet have the understanding and evidence that we need to decide future policy. However, one statistic is clear. Whether the victim of domestic abuse or violence is a woman or a man, they are 100 per cent the victim of it, and that can never be acceptable. I think that all members without exception agree that no one should experience abuse of any sort, particularly by someone close to them. That is a breach of trust, and it can have a devastating impact on aspects of their life.

I will say a word or two about victims. It is not just the man or woman who is the victim; children are victims as well. Another bit of research from the Scottish crime and justice survey that I have picked up on is that one third of victims had dependant children living with them at the time of the most recent incident of domestic abuse. In two thirds of the cases, the children were present when the incident took place. In 77 per cent of those cases, the children actually saw or heard what happened, and 20 per cent of them became involved in the incident. How horrific for any child to witness domestic abuse of any kind, and how horrific for a child, no matter what their age, to become involved in and a witness to domestic abuse.

Christine Grahame: Does the minister therefore accept—considering the thesis that I put forward about presumption and the fact that there may be doubt—that if the woman is the perpetrator but the father or man is removed, that compounds the tragedy and distress for the children?

Alex Neil: That highlights the point that I made earlier: we need a much greater understanding of

the evidence and what is actually happening. One action that I am taking forward from the debate is to commission more research to find out much more about what is behind the figures so that we can ensure that services are designed and tailored to meet the nature as well as the scale of the problem.

When we talk about children as victims, it is also important to remember that the long-term impact on them can be devastating. I am glad to say that we now have a group of young experts—voice against violence—who help us to develop and implement our policy. Those young people provide invaluable insights and their own perspectives to make things better for other young people who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Mike Rumbles: On the issue of changing perspectives, both Christine Grahame and I asked the minister this question: can we have even just one advert or poster that reflects the reality of domestic abuse against men?

Alex Neil: I will cover that point later in my speech.

We do not know much about the experiences of young people when their father is being abused by their mother, by a female partner or by a male partner. I fully acknowledge that gap in our knowledge, and it is something that I intend to address alongside the consideration of services for male victims. We need to know much more than we do at present about violence against men and about all those involved—victims, perpetrators and children.

Some of the responses involve the referral of men, whether they are victims or perpetrators, to support services in relation to, for example, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, legal advice or housing. They can also receive general counselling support.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will the minister give way on that point?

Alex Neil: I am sorry; I am going to run out of time.

I am particularly grateful to the male victims who have spoken out about their own experiences and raised our awareness of the issue, which has remained largely hidden until recently. Their courage has helped to ensure that others in the same situation will have the help that did not previously exist.

We know that we are at an early stage in our consideration of the issues for male victims, and I recognise that, although the helpline is a step forward, it is only the first step forward. I do not rule out, for example, future adverts that deal specifically with the problem of domestic abuse against men. As we know, one key objective of the

helpline is to help us gather the intelligence to inform policy. There is no point in our commissioning new services and adverts if they are not aimed at the right people, at the right time, in the right area and in the right circumstances. We have to have an informed approach for the future. The helpline, with other sources, will allow us to gather the intelligence that we need to ensure that the scale and nature of future service provision is designed along the right lines.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): You must draw to a close, please.

Alex Neil: A question was asked about funding, which I will cover very quickly. I give three commitments on funding. First, we will spend the £44 million to tackle violence against women over the three-year period up until next year. Secondly, the money that has been made available for the helpline has not come out of that budget. Thirdly, once we know our budget for next year, we will ensure that proper consideration is given to the allocation of resources to deal with all forms of domestic abuse in Scotland.

Decision Time

17:00

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

The first question is, that amendment S3M-6511.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6511, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (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

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the

division is: For 54, Against 49, Abstentions 13.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-6511, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 98, Against 0, Abstentions 18.

Motion, as amended agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill but, in so doing, believes that there is no evidence to support section 1, which would introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol, and

accordingly calls on the Scottish Government to lodge and move an amendment at stage 2 to delete section 1.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-5691, in the name of John Swinney, on the financial resolution on the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill, agrees to (a) any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3(b)(ii) of the Parliament's Standing Orders and (b) any charges or payments in relation to which Rule 9.12.4 of the Standing Orders applies, arising in consequence of the Act.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6531.2, in the name of Johann Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6531, in the name of Alex Neil, on violence against men, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunningham North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Abstentions

Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 85, Against 27, Abstentions 3.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-6531.1, in the name of John Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S3M-6531, in the name of Alex Neil, on violence against men, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Against

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

Abstentions

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 42, Abstentions 46.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S3M-6531, in the name of Alex Neil, on violence against men, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)

McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (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)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 85, Against 17, Abstentions 14.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that domestic abuse is a very serious and totally unacceptable problem in Scottish

society; notes in particular that all victims, whether they be women, men or children, deserve appropriate support; therefore welcomes the Scottish Government's provision of funding for a support helpline for male victims, which will provide the further information about their needs that is required before any future decisions about services are made, and reaffirms that domestic abuse is rooted in gender inequality, that overwhelmingly victims are women and that eradicating domestic abuse will only succeed where that pattern is acknowledged.

“My Hero, My Soldier Laddie”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-6437, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on “My Hero, My Soldier Laddie”, which commemorates Scotland's Victoria Cross recipients. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *My Hero, My Soldier Laddie* by artist and writer Duncan Brown, the illustrated story of Scotland's 172 recipients of the Victoria Cross (VC); notes that the book tells the individual stories of each of the 14 VC recipients who came from Lanarkshire, one in every hundred of all VC recipients ever awarded; further notes that, in 2001, Duncan Brown was instrumental in securing the raising of the monument that now stands in Hamilton Town Square to the memory of these 14 men, David Mackay of Auchenheth, Frederick Aikman and John O'Neill of Hamilton, William Gardner of Bothwell, Willie Angus, Thomas Caldwell and Donald Cameron of Carluke, David Lauder and John Carmichael of Airdrie, James Richardson of Bellshill, William Milne of Wishaw, John Hamilton of Cambuslang, William Clapp of Craigneuk and Bill Reid of Coatbridge; believes that the type of oral and social history found in *My Hero, My Soldier Laddie* plays a crucial role in uncovering, illuminating and preserving Scotland's past and the lives of ordinary Scots who made extraordinary contributions, and congratulates Duncan Brown on his considerable achievement in this respect.

17:07

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP):

I thank everyone who has stayed in the chamber for the debate and all the members who supported the motion, which received cross-party support from members of all the parties that are represented in the Parliament.

I pay tribute to the man who inspired the motion—Duncan Brown, who is in the public gallery tonight. When I say that he is an amateur historian, I mean that in the best sense. He pursues his passion for Scots history out of sheer love and an unshakeable belief in its importance and not for income or recognition. He is not attached to any academic institution and he undertook his research under his own steam, with painstaking dedication.

Duncan was lucky enough to count as a friend the late Nigel Tranter, whose books opened my eyes and those of many of us to the endless thrills and excitement that are to be found in the tales of Scottish history. Duncan continues to work in that tradition today. He is also a talented artist and a piper, by the way—I become exhausted just thinking about his talents.

Scotland has a long tradition of chroniclers such as Duncan—I lean often on my copy of Blind Harry's work to look back at Scotland's history.

Such chroniclers work in local history and archaeological groups or just beaver away on their own to add layers and nuggets of fact and detail to our nation's story. They are sometimes small and sometimes monumental, but they all enhance our understanding and our enjoyment of Scottish history. It is often said that such amateur historians have provided us with the tales of ordinary lives in towns and villages throughout the land—those of the farmer, the weaver, the rent striker, the dominie or the soldier—that bring depth, richness and colour to Scotland's story.

I realise that it is a bit unorthodox to plug items in the chamber, but I hope that members will not mind if I recommend to them all Duncan's book—"My Hero, My Soldier Laddie". The title comes from Robert Burns and the book is in the best tradition of the history that I have described. Half of all the proceeds of sales will go to the Erskine veterans charity.

Duncan's search for Scotland's Victoria Cross recipients began by chance when he played the pipes at a wedding in Cheltenham, of all places. A guest mentioned that she believed she had a Scottish ancestor—a David MacKay who had been in a Highland regiment and was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Duncan has painstakingly pieced together MacKay's life story. He discovered that MacKay not only took part in the famous thin red line during the Crimean war, but went on to be among the first group of men ever to be awarded the VC for the heroism he displayed during the siege of Lucknow in 1857, having been nominated by his fellow Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders for the honour.

MacKay was badly wounded but survived and returned to Lesmahagow, where Duncan eventually traced his remains to an unmarked pauper's grave. Discovering that sad fate of a man who should still be recognised as a Scots hero, regardless of our feelings now about the role of the British empire in India, prompted Duncan to go on to uncover the details of 172 Scottish VCs. He found that no fewer than 14 among them hailed from the towns and villages of Lanarkshire.

Before I speak about Lanarkshire, I pay tribute to Thomas Peck Hunter, a Royal Marine who received the Victoria Cross and who happens to be the uncle of a proud John Swinney.

In fact, one VC in every 100 awarded has gone to a Lanarkshire man—an astonishing record for our small county. Three recipients came from Carluke alone. I wish that I had time to talk about every one of them but, having spoken about the first, I also want to say something about the last VC recipient, Bill Reid, whom Duncan Brown was able to meet and talk to before his death in 2001. I feel a particular affinity with Bill, because he was

originally a Baillieston native and that is where I live now.

In November 1943, the Lancaster bomber that Bill was flying across the Dutch coast towards Germany twice came under attack. His navigator and wireless operator were killed, he himself was badly wounded, the plane's oxygen system ruptured and the hydraulics were damaged. However, instead of turning back, Bill fought his plane back under control, flew on and completed his mission.

After recovering from his wounds, Bill joined the 617 Squadron with Leonard Cheshire and, on his first flight, he fouled up his landing and knocked the tail off his plane. He had an endorsement put in his logbook and later joked that he was surely

"the only pilot to get a Victoria Cross on one trip and a red endorsement on the next."

Bill Reid was an extremely modest man and modest about his bravery. I am sure that some other men would have used it as a great chat-up line but, when Bill got married in 1952, he had not even told his wife.

Explaining later how he had been able to act with such heroism, Bill simply said:

"When you lost people who were your closest friends, the danger certainly came home to you. If you'd thought it would happen to you, too, you'd simply never have been able to fly again."

People such as Bill who did not perform great acts of bravery for Queen and country usually performed them for their band of brothers or the man standing next to them. That is an important piece of history that all our young people should know about. Reading stories such as his brings home not only how much we owe men such as him and his fellow VC recipients, but how important it is that those of us who live in Scotland now and in future generations continue to read and hear those stories and do not forget the extraordinary contributions that ordinary people made to secure our freedom and democracy.

If members are ever in Hamilton, I encourage and invite them to visit the memorial to the Lanarkshire VCs in the town square, which was unveiled in 2005 after a campaign by Duncan Brown and a public appeal by the *Hamilton Advertiser*. The poem inscribed on the memorial is by 12-year-old Anna Smith from Our Lady's high school and it captures the spirit of tonight's debate for me. It reads:

"You are heroes in our hearts, and that you'll always stay
Courageous and heroic in every possible way.
You sacrificed so much for us - a debt we can't repay.
You fought for us and bled for us and we thank you on this day."

I thank all members who are taking part in the debate.

17:13

Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): I congratulate Christina McKelvie warmly on securing the debate. The motion says so much, but I also warmly welcome her speech, which gives an insight not only into how the book came about but the thoughts and values that are inherent in its content.

I have had the pleasure of attending veterans day in East Kilbride over many years and have had the opportunity to discuss with veterans who are still with us their courage and their endeavours, and to recognise those. The things that those people went through and the valour and courage that they showed are almost unthinkable to us—perhaps there are a few exceptions to that among members—and we deserve to recognise them.

Christina McKelvie talks about Scotland's rich history and the books that we have in common. I remember reading "McCrae's Battalion", which is about Hearts football club in the first world war. It is a heart-rending story, but it also gives the reader a social consciousness. It brings Scotland's history together and allows us to understand some of the values that were applied at that time to footballers, who were seen to be dodging the war. If members recall the story, those footballers went off to war and most of the team were wiped out in a single action.

Such books bring together our rich history. They are a great reminder to us, young and old alike, of the contribution that individuals have made to Scotland and the UK and to our lives in general. It was interesting to learn about the proud role that people from Lanarkshire have played in our armed forces and the number of VCs that they have gained. It is right that many members from Lanarkshire are here for the debate. I, too, welcomed the unveiling of the arch memorial in Hamilton. We should ensure that our children see such memorials and we should talk to them about the issue, so that we can create an understanding and so help to avoid the catastrophic wars that sadly continue throughout the world. We must try to educate and allow people to understand the contribution that people such as those who are mentioned in the book have made over the years to our nation and the lives of the people of Scotland and beyond.

I thank Christina McKelvie for the motion and for drawing the Parliament's attention to the book. I hope that it will continue to play a part in creating the respect that we must all show those who serve Scotland and the nation generally.

17:16

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Christina McKelvie on bringing this members' business debate to the Scottish Parliament and on bringing the rightful recognition to the men who are in the book. Their families, descendants and many friends must feel pride in seeing such a wonderful record now in print.

We do not see the word "valour" very much these days, but the simple words "For Valour" on the Victoria Cross tell us that something special occurred in the life of the person who proudly wore it or was awarded it. Those acts of bravery and heroic courage could not have been predicted and certainly not expected of ordinary men in such circumstances. However, they occurred time and again, and that is why "My Hero, My Soldier Laddie" is important. When I first saw Mr Brown's book, I was struck by the beautiful artwork that accompanies the testimonials that make up that fine piece of work. It is very readable and I like the way that the reader can easily dip in and out to pick the stories that they want to read. Scotland's schoolchildren would certainly do well to take a look at it.

I was intrigued to read how Mr Brown started on his journey of finding out about Scotland's 172 Victoria Cross awards and the incredible 14 that were awarded to men in Lanarkshire alone. This is how he describes his encounter with Private David MacKay, who was among the first to be awarded the VC:

"Suddenly, there he was. In bold capitals. PRIVATE DAVID MACKAY, LUCKNOW, 1857. I stared at his name over and over. He does exist! What must I do now? My mind was racing. I dare say an experienced family researcher would have reached this stage quicker than I, but David Mackay seemed to be waiting just for me. And no one can ever take that from me now."

What a wonderful description of the moment that led to the fine book that we are discussing.

We can tell that Mr Brown was immediately drawn to the story of David MacKay, who was a mere 23 years old when he stood with his Highland comrades in the thin red line at Balaclava in 1854. Those were dark days in Scotland, with the cholera epidemic claiming thousands of lives and the scandal of the clearances still going on in the Highlands. As Mr Brown says, they were turbulent times, but when was it ever anything else?

Our connection in modern times with our armed forces personnel is mostly through remembrance day in November each year when we, as elected members, have the privilege of laying wreaths on behalf of our communities for our fallen heroes. I have had the honour of doing that for some years as the constituency member for Kilmarnock and

Loudoun, but I have been a regular at Kilmarnock cenotaph since I was a boy. I was taken there by my father in my childhood to remember the Scots who gave their lives in the ultimate sacrifice.

When one reads about the men in “My Hero, My Soldier Laddie”, one after the other, putting their lives on the line for their friends, comrades and their country—as our serving personnel are still doing now as we have the debate—one cannot help but feel a sense of humility along with a feeling of pride and admiration for their bravery. Surely we cannot reasonably expect them to demonstrate such heroism and determination in the face of so many dangers, but they do it time and again. No one could possibly tell what the future would hold for Private David MacKay in the 1850s or what the future will hold for a young constituent of mine, Robert James Miller Scott, who only yesterday set out on his journey to be a Scottish soldier. Of this I am sure: all the serving Scots who put their lives on the line for us deserve our respect and much more than our thanks.

The present times in Scotland might also be fairly turbulent, in different ways of course but, as Mr Brown says in his book, when was it ever anything else?

17:20

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on securing the debate and commend her for her excellent motion, which I was pleased to sign. I join her in congratulating and thanking Duncan Brown for his considerable achievement, which she set out in her speech.

As we have heard, the Victoria Cross is the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. Some say that we use the term “hero” too often these days but, without doubt, individuals who receive the Victoria Cross are true heroes who have put their lives at great peril or have lost their lives serving this country and protecting their comrades.

Christina McKelvie’s motion rightly highlights recipients of the Victoria Cross from Lanarkshire, as we would expect. My region of Mid Scotland and Fife is the birthplace and resting place of many men who won the Victoria Cross. If members will indulge me for a moment, I will mention one or two of them.

Kirriemuir cemetery in Angus is the resting place of two Victoria Cross winners: Private Charles Melvin of the Black Watch, who won his VC at Istanbul, Mesopotamia—modern-day Iraq—on 21 April 1917 and Corporal Richard Burton, who won his VC at Monte Ceco in Italy on 8 October 1944.

Captain William Stewart of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was born in Grandtully in Perthshire and is buried there. He won his VC at Secundra Bagh during the Indian mutiny on 16 November 1857.

Flight Lieutenant William Reid of the Royal Air Force won his VC during the raid on Düsseldorf on 3 November 1943 and now rests in Crieff cemetery.

Sergeant Alexander Thompson of the Black Watch won his VC at Fort Ruhya during the Indian mutiny on 15 April 1858. He lies in Wellshill cemetery in Perth.

Dunfermline’s cemetery is the final resting place of Dunfermline’s Sergeant David Hunter of the Highland Light Infantry, who won his VC at Moeuvres in France on 16 September 1918.

The spread of those names and the different conflicts in which they fought in all parts of the world illustrates the tremendous contribution that Scottish soldiers have made over the centuries as part of the British Army. Of course, those men are just some of the brave men who have risked their lives for their country and the cause of freedom. I welcome the opportunity to put on the record my gratitude for their unflinching courage in the face of the enemy.

I am sure that Christina McKelvie and all members present will want to join me in thanking Michael, Lord Ashcroft, who has the largest Victoria Cross collection in the world, for allowing his collection to go on public display, following his £5 million donation to the Imperial War Museum. I am sure that we are all grateful to Lord Ashcroft for his generous support of many good and worthwhile causes. Lord Ashcroft is also the author of the book “Victoria Cross Heroes”, which was published in 2006 to mark the 150th anniversary of the creation of the Victoria Cross. I hope that Christina McKelvie and all other members present will take the opportunity to read that publication if they have not already done so. The nation genuinely owes a debt of gratitude to Lord Ashcroft for bringing together so many VCs, which in themselves are worth several million pounds, and providing the funds for a new gallery to show them to the public.

It is hard, if not impossible, to set out in words the bravery, devotion and sacrifice of all the individuals who have been mentioned in the debate and in Duncan Brown’s book. I hope that the debate goes some way towards showing our respect for and debt to those men. I thank Christina McKelvie for giving us this opportunity.

17:24

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): Like other members, I congratulate Christina McKelvie on bringing the debate to the Parliament. I also congratulate Duncan Brown on the publication of his book on the 172 Scottish recipients of the Victoria Cross.

This week, I am hosting the Royal Air Forces Association, which has a display just outside the chamber to mark the 70th anniversary of the battle of Britain, a battle that started just a few miles from here over the Forth and a battle for which many air fighters won the Victoria Cross in defence of our nation. Many Royal Air Force men who won the Victoria Cross made the ultimate sacrifice, such as Ayrshire Flying Officer Kenneth Campbell, who, with 1,000 guns firing at him, ran the gauntlet at 50ft above sea level in Brest harbour and successfully released his torpedoes at an enemy ship, but never got out of the harbour. The Germans gave him full military honours at his burial. I think that we all agree that we owe so much to those few.

We should also remember recipients of the Victoria Cross who were not from these British Isles. I refer to recipients from what used to be called the British Empire and from the Commonwealth. Many of them were Indian, Caribbean, Canadian, Australian, New Zealander, Nepalese or from the African Commonwealth countries.

The Victoria Cross has been awarded to more than 1,350 people. We owe a great debt to those individuals.

Nearer to hand, if I may be parochial, my South of Scotland region was the home of individuals who went the extra mile in their duties. One such individual was Thomas Caldwell of Carlisle, who is mentioned in Christina McKelvie's motion. In the closing weeks of the first world war, he courageously and under close-range heavy fire ran single-handedly at an enemy position, took control of it and captured 18 prisoners.

Elsewhere from my region, James Blair of Melrose was injured while serving in India, but with not much more than the hilt of a sword he headed up his men and charged rebels, with total effect. Also in India, Tom Cadell of Cockenzie in East Lothian risked his life to save his fellow men by twice going under heavy fire, once to pick up and rescue a wounded bugler and then, again facing a wall of lead, to rescue a wounded man from the 75th regiment who had been left behind.

In Moffat, there is the grave of Lieutenant Wallace from Thornhill—no relation to Jim Wallace—who, on finding himself completely surrounded and with only five men, maintained firing by running from gun to gun for eight hours

until, completely exhausted, he retreated successfully, taking all his wounded men and guns with him. That was real courage in an impossible situation.

An Ayrshire private, Ross Tollerton, is also mentioned in the book. He put others' lives before his own in going under heavy fire. With head and hand injuries, he returned to rescue his wounded lieutenant. That not being enough, he resumed his post, held the position and nursed his lieutenant for three days until they were rescued. Again, his actions went well beyond the call of duty. Like many others, Private Tollerton never recovered from his injuries and died at the young age of 41.

Tomorrow sees the famous Hawick common riding, which celebrates the daring raid on English troops by Hawick men and their return with the English standard in 1514. Five hundred years later, a certain Hawick man called John Daykins inspired his fellow troops by rushing two machine gun posts in France. By hand-to-hand fighting alone, he returned with 25 prisoners and the enemy's machine gun. Without doubt, that was bravery in the extreme.

One other special Victoria Cross was awarded. In 1921, in the United States, it was awarded to the unknown soldier to mark those who fell for us all, whose deeds were never witnessed but who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we all could have the liberty that we often, but should not, take for granted.

The Victoria Cross may be made of fairly cheap bronze, but it is the ultimate recognition of what is often the ultimate that someone can do for others. I welcome the motion and the book that recognises the 172 Scottish Victoria Cross recipients who showed

"conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy."

The debate, book and motion are a small way of showing our gratitude for the valour of all those—past, present and future—who were and are prepared to put themselves in danger for others.

17:29

The Minister for Housing and Communities (Alex Neil): Although my job title is Minister for Housing and Communities, I also have ministerial responsibility for veterans. Some of my duties in that role are the most pleasant that I have to carry out as a minister. Speaking in tonight's debate is one such duty.

Like all the other members who have spoken, I congratulate Christina McKelvie on securing this debate. I welcome Duncan Brown to the gallery and hope that he is enjoying the debate. His book

is fascinating and told me a thing or two that I did not know about the history of the Victoria Cross. Until the Crimean war, the only real medal was the Order of the Bath, which was for those and such as those. The book describes how, after the Crimean war, the Duke of Newcastle wrote to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, to suggest that an award be created, as there were so many brave people who should not go unrewarded and unrecognised. Eventually, the Queen and the Secretary of State for War agreed that there should be such an award. Originally, it was to be called the Military Order of Victoria, a title that was eventually shortened to Victoria Cross.

Also unbeknown to me was the fact that, when people received the Victoria Cross in those days, they were awarded what Duncan Brown describes as a parsimonious annual £10. I do not know whether that is still the case. Arrangements were made for the first presentations of the medal to take place on 26 June 1857, in Hyde Park in London.

The book provides a fascinating account of the history. In particular, it points out the importance of Lanarkshire. I have tried but have so far been unable to check whether the figure of 14 for a single county is a record for the whole country. If it is not, it must be close to being one, despite the attempts of Murdo Fraser and Jim Tolson to make such claims for Perthshire and Kinross and the Borders. As Jim Tolson rightly pointed out, many brave and valiant fighters came not just from the rest of the United Kingdom but from the rest of the empire.

I am particularly gladdened by the fact that a large part of the proceeds from the book and the profit from the sale of prints of its illustrations will go to Erskine Hospital Ltd, which is one of the finest institutions in Scotland. I am sure that Duncan Brown's generous offer will be warmly applauded everywhere.

As members have pointed out, the bravery, gallantry and achievements of the 14 Lanarkshire-born Victoria Cross recipients, all 172 Scottish recipients of that accolade and all other veterans, irrespective of whether they were awarded a medal of whatever type, cannot be ignored, forgotten or lost in history. We should acknowledge on a regular basis their sacrifice and selflessness in securing the freedoms that all of us now take for granted. To ignore those men and the history of the Victoria Cross and those who won it would be a disservice to them. Their stories are important. History is important. We, our children and future generations must maintain the link with the past.

The monument in Hamilton to the Lanarkshire-born Victoria Cross holders is a fabulous way of

keeping their memory alive. It is a fitting tribute to those 14 brave men. I congratulate everyone who was involved in the fund raising to make the monument a reality. Duncan Brown's book is an excellent way of recording and learning about the achievements of the men who are commemorated on the monument. It is both an easy and an engaging read—once someone has started to read it, they will want to finish it—and is one of the best-written books that I have ever read. Willie Coffey was right to say that many schoolchildren—not just the length and breadth of Scotland, but throughout the United Kingdom—will want to read the book and will find the history and stories that it contains fascinating.

I will say a word or two about monuments, given that we have talked about the Hamilton monument. There is a body of opinion in Scotland that the Scottish Government should maintain war memorials in Scotland. That is a perfectly justifiable view and I understand and sympathise with it. The problem is that the Imperial War Museum has estimated that there are between 3,000 and 5,000 monuments in Scotland, and keeping up the standard of monuments involves a huge cost.

Therefore, I take the opportunity to welcome the establishment of a new graves and monuments trust in Edinburgh, which will have the task of maintaining some of the monuments in Edinburgh. I hope that we can do something similar in Lanarkshire, Ayrshire, Glasgow and Dunbartonshire—and in every city and county the length and breadth of Scotland. That would be a fitting tribute from our communities to those to whom we owe so much.

We are proud of our heritage and we are very proud of the people who fought for our freedoms. It is right that the national Parliament of Scotland should recognise and pay tribute to them and that it should thank Duncan Brown for having done such a wonderful service for the whole nation in writing his excellent book.

Meeting closed at 17:36.

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