



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 20 January 2011

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 January 2011

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

Protecting Public Services

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7735, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on protecting public services.

09:15

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): As the smallest party in the Parliament, the Greens quite rarely have the opportunity to bring motions to the Parliament for debate, so what topic to choose for our limited time is always a difficult decision.

This time, however, the topic was an obvious choice. Is there any other subject that we could bring to the Parliament for debate in the current context that would not be completely overshadowed by the public spending cuts? The cuts that the United Kingdom Government is imposing, to which the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament must respond, would dominate a debate on higher education, on housing, on poverty and inequality, on health services, and on jobs and the economy. Is there a subject that is not affected, indeed overshadowed, by that context? Every subject that we could debate is profoundly affected.

That context is the first great test of devolution. It is the first great test of whether the hopes and aspirations of the many thousands of people who campaigned long and hard for a Scottish Parliament are to be realised or ignored. People did not put in those years and decades of work to campaign for a Scottish Parliament to give members jobs. They did not campaign long and hard so that there would be a weekly First Minister's question time on television and they would be able to get angry and rant at the telly. They did not even campaign long and hard for a Scottish Parliament simply out of a sense of national identity.

The profound reason why this Parliament exists and why we debate issues in this chamber week in and week out is a desire on the part of the Scottish people, after the scandal of the poll tax and the years of Tory cuts and privatisation, for a Parliament that would be able to defend Scotland against that right-wing agenda, should it ever come to power again.

Well, that is no longer a theory; it is a reality. The UK now has a Government that is imposing a

radical right-wing agenda of cuts, for which it has no mandate and which was never in the manifestos of the Tories or the Liberals—the Government certainly has no mandate for its agenda in Scotland. The agenda is ideologically driven by many people on the right of the Tory party, who have for years been gagging for an opportunity such as they now have. It is clear that it will impact on the poorest in society. We are not “all in this together”; the Osbornes and the Cleggs will be well protected from the effects of the cuts that they are imposing on the rest of us.

Even if we set aside the Green interpretation of economics, with which most members who are present disagree, and consider the issue in conventional economic terms, it is clear that the slashing of hundreds of thousands—perhaps even a million—jobs, which will be destroyed because of the cuts in spending in the public sector and the knock-on effects in the private sector, is wildly economically risky.

The Scottish Parliament needs to oppose that agenda. If we are to do so we need not only the power but the political will to do so. The Scottish National Party often makes the case that we need more powers and more economic levers at our fingertips if we are to pursue a political agenda in the face of opposition from the UK. The Labour case currently seems to be that more powers are on their way, through the recommendations of the Calman commission on Scottish devolution and the Scotland Bill, which has Labour support at UK level. As for the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, they will not oppose the coalition's agenda, because it is their agenda.

We have no idea whether the Calman powers would help. In any case it is likely to be years before we can use them. As for the SNP's call for more powers, the Green response is that we have never successfully and creatively used the powers that we have. One such power—the first that is mentioned in the motion—is the Scottish variable rate of income tax, which was democratically endorsed by the public in a referendum, but which successive Governments have failed to maintain. I know that it would not be popular to use the SVR, but if we cannot use it now, when public services and the very principles that underlie the welfare state are under attack as they never have been, when can we use it? In November the Parliament agreed to a Labour amendment that said that the Parliament

“considers it an abuse of power for the Scottish Government to abandon the Scottish variable rate of tax ... considers it unacceptable for ministers to mislead the Parliament ... and calls on the Scottish Government to admit responsibility for the lapse of the tax varying powers”.

However, the amendment said nothing about what should be done to fix the situation. My motion

therefore calls on the Scottish Government to open negotiations with the UK Government to restore the functionality of the power.

Use of the power might not be necessary. Greens have suggested other options. In the short term, raising revenue on empty properties could bring in something in the region of £75 million and removing council tax discounts for empty and second homes could add a little more to that total. Scotland is the only part of the UK that is still giving a tax break for urban blight; using that power differently would not only bring in revenue to protect services but reduce rental costs for viable businesses, which could take up those premises. In the longer term, our land value tax proposals could bring in £1.5 billion more than the council tax and business rates that they would replace, which could be used in the first instance to protect services. We would eventually have the freedom to reduce either LVT or income tax through the Scottish variable rate.

The underlying theme must be the empowerment of local councils to make their own decisions. John Swinney and his colleagues continually call for financial powers and I often sympathise with their call, but we can create these powers for ourselves if we empower local authorities. Beyond that, we could explore local authorities' ability to borrow, which is an ability that the Scottish Government does not currently have.

During the debate many members will focus on household budgets and the cost of housing, energy, transport, food and so on. Green policies, and many policies that have taken hold across the political spectrum, would help to reduce all those costs, but that cannot happen without investment and commitment from Government. We need to have the political will to raise revenue to defend Scotland against the UK Government's agenda. It is not just about the powers that are available; it is about having the political will to use them.

I move,

That the Parliament calls on ministers to open discussions in good faith with their UK counterparts regarding the prompt re-establishment of the democratically endorsed Scottish variable rate of income tax; believes that the UK Government's cuts agenda is ideologically driven, economically illiterate and will have a disproportionate impact on poorer people both in Scotland and in the rest of the UK; rejects the Scottish Government's decision simply to hand on these cuts to Scottish public services, with housing, energy efficiency and public transport particularly at threat; believes that the terms of the proposed council tax freeze reduce local authorities' ability to make their own democratic decisions and look at alternatives to cutting vital local services, and urges the Scottish Government to revise the draft budget to reduce these cuts by incorporating progressive ways to raise revenue at a local level within the existing powers of the Scottish Parliament to ensure that wealthier people pay more and poorer people pay less, including options such as land value tax, a hotel bed tax and reducing exemptions to the uniform business rate.

09:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Some elements of Mr Harvie's speech struck a chord with me. I have much sympathy with his critique of the reductions in public expenditure. I have said in the Parliament on countless occasions—it is no secret—that the Scottish Government takes the view that the UK Government's approach to significant reduction in public spending is being taken too far and too fast.

The issue that the Parliament must confront is that we must operate within the financial arrangements that we have at our disposal. That is a particularly acute responsibility for a finance secretary in a Government that does not command an automatic majority, because I must present to the Parliament a balanced budget and I must work with colleagues in other political parties to find a basis on which we can agree the terms and composition of the budget.

That process is under way. I presented the draft budget to the Parliament in November and the committees of the Parliament have been scrutinising it. This morning, the Finance Committee published its report on Scotland's spending plans and draft budget 2011-12, to which the Government will respond during next Wednesday's debate, which will mark stage 1 of the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill and include debate on the committee's consideration of the budget proposals. I look forward to setting out the Government's thinking on another comprehensive and thoughtful report from the committee.

At the heart of what lies ahead for the Parliament in the next couple of weeks is the necessity to find common ground on which we can agree the composition of the budget and how we can deliver that budget for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

At the heart of our budget is the determination to preserve public services and deliver economic growth. As part of the proposals that we have advanced in the draft budget, we honour our commitment to pass on to the health service the consequences of the United Kingdom Government's decisions on health expenditure. Therefore, there is a real-terms increase in health expenditure in the budget.

We have also taken decisions to protect families through the continuation of the council tax freeze and the phasing out of prescription charges. We have sustained our commitment to maintain police numbers, which has resulted in a 32-year low in crime. We also continue to invest in Scotland's potential through investment in skills and training and the continuation of the education maintenance allowance.

All those commitments are in the budget and I use them as illustrations of the focus of the Government's thinking. Although I sympathise with Mr Harvie's point about the scale of reductions in public expenditure, I accept a point that Jeremy Purvis and Derek Brownlee have previously advanced that, despite the reductions in public spending, there still remains a substantial amount of public expenditure in Scotland and we have to design the most effective ways to spend it.

In the context that we face, any budget must include a balance between reductions in public expenditure and the raising of revenue. I have been clear with the Parliament about the steps that I have taken on the raising of revenue and the reductions in public spending.

I do not agree with Mr Harvie that it would be appropriate to increase the basic rate of income tax through the Scottish variable rate. The points that he made about the discussions that we had in the Parliament last November on the use of that power and the arrangements to implement it are not particularly relevant in this debate. I will appear at the Finance Committee on Tuesday to discuss those points and will be delighted to do so.

The point about the use of the Scottish variable rate is whether placing an additional tax burden on hard-working families in Scotland is the right thing to do when people already face rising VAT, very substantial increases in fuel costs and other pressures on household incomes.

Patrick Harvie: The point in my motion is not that the SVR ought to be used—we have not yet proposed that and have said that it may not be necessary—but that it ought to be restored so that it is available for use. Is it not for the public to decide in the election in May whether they want to vote for candidates who say that they would use it or those who say that they would not?

John Swinney: It is not a question of the power being restored. The power exists in law; that is crystal clear. The issue is whether the information technology systems can enable the collection of the tax. My point, which I will reiterate to the Finance Committee on Tuesday, is that I did not inherit a system that was fit to do that.

I have considered increases in revenue and have put before the Parliament proposals for an increase in business rates on the largest retail properties as a means of raising additional revenue. As the First Minister has said to the Parliament, those who have the broadest shoulders should bear some of the burden, and I invite the Parliament to support the measures that I have set out in that respect.

This is a timely debate. It gives us the opportunity to reflect on some of the difficult choices with which I have had to wrestle as

Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth and which underpin the Parliament's consideration of the budget over the next fortnight. I look forward to those discussions and I give the Parliament the assurance that is in my amendment: that we will

"work together to deliver a balanced budget that will safeguard services and strengthen economic growth for Scotland".

I move amendment S3M-7735.2, to leave out from "ministers" to end and insert:

"all parties in the Parliament to work together to deliver a balanced budget that will safeguard services and strengthen economic growth for Scotland."

09:29

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): Whatever differences I might have with Scottish Green Party policies, I have always recognised that their motivation is essentially optimism. Too often, I find the Greens overly idealistic and even utopian but, although I am regularly unable to agree with them, I would never criticise them for believing in a programme that is genuinely aimed at protecting what we have and bettering the lives of everyone who shares our planet. This morning, however, I fear that their idealism may have gone too far.

We have spent the past four years watching the Government pick fights at every opportunity with Westminster, being aware of documents that reveal that the Scottish Government instructed the civil service to seek divisions with Whitehall at every opportunity and looking on as day in, day out the Scottish ministers play the blame game with successive UK Governments. So it is surely the ultimate triumph of hope over experience to begin any motion in the Parliament by asking the SNP Administration to

"open discussions in good faith with their UK counterparts".

It must surely also be the most futile request ever put to the Administration, that it disavow the reckless underfunding of council services that it implemented in pursuit of a headline-grabbing policy instead of delivering what is necessary to protect local communities and local services. It has chosen to move away from the use of council tax towards huge increases in rents and charges for services and has reduced the availability of those services as a result. The Greens are right to point that out in their motion.

Freezing the council tax is not a bad policy in itself, but coercing local authorities into agreeing to an underfunded freeze—which all the evidence clearly shows has led to reductions in services, increased charges and job losses—is horrendously bad government.

Patrick Harvie: I agree with the member that the freeze in council tax has been popular. Many people like it but, if we acknowledge together that it cannot last for ever—council tax cannot dwindle to nothing year after year—the only exit strategy from the freeze is for the Parliament to give councils more power and flexibility to raise taxes in the way and at the level that they see fit.

Michael McMahon: I will move away from the sterile debate about whether we should try to impose restrictions on local government. The Government's aim of ensuring that the council tax does not overburden council tax payers is not, in itself, a bad thing, but we must be much more imaginative about how we enable our local authorities to deliver public services.

Through the policies that it has pursued, the Scottish Government has centralised power and taken hold of the balance in local government finances, which is now somewhere in the region of 85 per cent central funding to 15 per cent local funding. It has completely undermined the democratic policies under which local authorities should be allowed to operate, although to ask local authorities to be careful about how they use the revenue-raising mechanisms that are available to them is not in itself a bad thing.

The way in which the Scottish Government has operated in relation to local government displays the same ruinous attitude that leads to it doctoring Government reports to justify the arguments against the findings of the Calman commission. *[Interruption.]* The minister can harrumph all he wants from his sedentary position, but we know that he dressed up a report to make it look as though academics supported him when that was not necessarily the case. Rather than seek to work constructively with the UK Government to improve devolution through the Scotland Bill, the SNP Administration reverts to type and carps, criticises and condemns.

The main reason that I cannot accept the Green motion is that it ignores the fact that implementing the measures to increase revenue in the ways that are suggested would lead to ordinary people, who are already being hammered by the disastrous Con-Dem policies, being further adversely affected, regardless of how progressive Mr Harvie's suggestions are.

The Greens are right to suggest that alternatives to the blunt instrument of the underfunded council tax freeze should be considered, especially to lift the heavy hand of coercion that Mr Swinney imposed on councils, but they are being impractical and imprudent and not offering a considered way out of the mistakes that are being wrought against Scotland by its Government and the UK Government, so Labour cannot, ultimately, agree with them.

I move amendment S3M-7735.4, to leave out from first “; believes” to end and insert:

“in order to ensure that the appropriate mechanism is in place for the introduction of tax-raising powers recommended by the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution and contained in the Scotland Bill currently before the UK Parliament and believes that the Scottish Government's continued underfunding of the council tax freeze has directly led to cuts in vital local services”.

09:34

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con):

Some years back, Patrick Harvie referred to me as being a progressive, although he subsequently decided to spare my blushes by not referring to me by name when he followed up that comment in a newspaper article. It is in the progressive spirit that I will be happy to move my amendment.

The ideas of protecting public services and creating jobs, to which my amendment refers, are shared across the political spectrum. We might have rather different ideas about how those are achieved, but the underlying objective is surely the same. I take issue with Patrick Harvie, however, when he refers to the “right-wing” Government because, as everyone is well aware, we have a progressive Liberal-Conservative Government, which is very different. The Government is repaying the debt that the Labour Party ran up, lifting the lower paid out of income tax and reforming the welfare state to make work pay. Those are all sensible and progressive objectives and I would have thought that most members would support them.

Patrick Harvie also referred to the prospect of millions of jobs being lost, which I must say was rather scaremongering. If we go back to the experience that this country had in the 1990s, when there was a retrenchment in public spending, although jobs were lost in the public sector, many more were created in the private sector, so overall employment levels rose. That of course had a beneficial impact in rebalancing the economy and providing a sustainable basis for providing the income tax revenues that are necessary to sustain our public services.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): My fear is that we go back to the 1980s. The UK unemployment figures that were released yesterday show youth unemployment approaching 1 million, and that is my fear about Con-Dem policies.

Derek Brownlee: To be fair to the member, in the 1980s, we had a difficult inheritance from the previous Labour Government, so I can see why he might wish to draw parallels with the situation in which the current UK Government finds itself. I assume that the flexibility that we have developed in the labour market will lead to less of an increase

in unemployment than the member fears. Certainly, the work programme that the coalition is launching hopes to ensure extra opportunities for those who might lose their jobs.

We heard in the speech from the Labour Party the oft-repeated phrase that the council tax freeze is underfunded. That was proven to be incorrect when the council tax freeze was first mooted. If I recall the figures correctly, there is £70 million of subsidy to councils compared to about £55 million that is actually necessary to fund the council tax freeze. So £70 million has been supplied every year, which means that in fact councils have had a windfall benefit through the funding of the council tax freeze. It is simply not correct to say that the freeze has been underfunded. Those who oppose the council tax freeze simply need to tell us how much more council tax people should pay, or what spending should be cut elsewhere to give more money to local authorities.

Patrick Harvie said that existing powers should be used “creatively”. I wondered what he meant by that, but he soon explained and said that he meant that taxes should increase. If I have the figures correct, he proposed £1.5 billion of extra tax for Scotland, which is about an additional £3,000 per person and which does not seem to me to be particularly progressive.

There is a simple option for Patrick Harvie and the Greens and the usual collection of self-proclaimed socialists who lecture us daily about the need to tax and spend more. They could follow the example of Hazel Blears by writing a cheque for whatever amount of tax they feel that they should pay and sending it off to HM Revenue and Customs. That cheque will be cashed, their guilt will be assuaged and another part of Labour’s debt will be repaid. There is nothing to prevent any socialist in this country from putting their money where their mouth is. The new progressive coalition Government would be happy to take money that is given voluntarily and we would not wish in any way to have any socialist in this country prevented from putting their principles, which are deeply held, into practice.

I move amendment S3M-7735.3, to leave out from “calls” to end and insert:

“believes that ensuring a strong economy is the best way to protect public services and create jobs and rejects calls to increase devolved taxes, for example by ending the council tax freeze or introducing a new non-domestic rate supplement for retailers.”

09:38

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): There is no question but that Scotland still has huge difficulties in addressing the colossal deficit that the previous UK administration left. The figure amounts to about

£2,500 per person in Scotland and the interest payment alone on the structural deficit, per day, is about the same as the cost of building a primary school in Scotland. That is the context. The Green Party is freer than most in casting aspersions on other parties’ philosophies and discussing whether they have been betrayed, so we need to consider its position a little closer to home.

We cannot forget that we face significant difficulties. We must face up to them and address them properly. Many SNP members use a different tone from the language that the cabinet secretary uses. He simply says that the reductions are “too far and too fast”, but at no stage has he told the UK Government what would not be too far or too fast. However, the SNP back benchers always give the impression that there should be no reductions at all. Neither of those positions is credible, given the difficulties that we face.

Last autumn, the Liberal Democrats published proposals for £4 billion-worth of savings in the next four years by reforming or reducing the number of quangos, bringing down top pay, setting bonuses at zero, gaining efficiencies at 2.75 per cent per annum over that period and looking at some other areas. That is about working to protect front-line public services by securing better value from the public purse over the next four years, which is the approach that all parties should take.

Patrick Harvie stated that the position that the Liberal Democrats have taken as part of the UK Government is ideologically driven. He referred to a coalition Government that is doing damage and imposing difficulties on the people of Scotland. We do not have to go as far as London to find another coalition or to see what a Green minister would do, because Dublin is closer to Edinburgh than London is—it is about as far as Nottingham. So let us have a look at what John Gormley, the leader of the Irish Green Party, which is the sister party of the Green Party in Scotland—the two work closely on many issues—said on 10 December in the Dáil. He said:

“We must take swift harsh measures”,

and that local government

“must play its part by curtailing expenditure to the absolute neediest priorities”.

He said that local government would have enough resources only for “essential services”. Is that ideologically driven from that coalition?

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Purvis: I am afraid that I do not have time, as I am in my final minute.

Patrick Harvie: The member asked me a question.

Jeremy Purvis: No. Let us look at what that Green minister defended. It was cutting average welfare payments by 4 per cent, which means that families in receipt of welfare payments will suffer a 7 per cent loss of income. That is far beyond anything in the worst of what Patrick Harvie can dream up about the UK coalition. In Ireland, the health budget has been slashed by €700 million. Public sector pensions have been cut by €12,000 and public sector staff have had a 10 per cent wage cut, whereas public sector workers in the United Kingdom who earn under £21,000 can have a pay increase, and I am glad that the Scottish Government has followed that. The minimum wage in Ireland is being cut by a euro, and those on the new wage will be brought into the tax net.

Finally—I hope that this allows Mr Harvie to take a slight pause in the sanctimony that we have heard from him—it is estimated that more than 130,000 low-paid people in Ireland will be brought into the tax net, when 90,000 of the lowest-paid workers in Scotland will be lifted out of income tax in April this year, because the income tax threshold in Scotland is going up, but in Ireland it is going down.

Mr Harvie's colleague in the Irish Green Party was proud of one success, which was that corporation tax in Ireland, which is the lowest in Europe, will remain unchanged. So all the corporate evil that Mr Harvie lectures others about in the Parliament will receive the lowest tax, and his sister party in Ireland is proud of that. Let us have a look at that other coalition and see whether he wishes to use that as an example.

I move amendment S3M-7735.1, to leave out from "calls" to end and insert:

"notes that, as a result of Labour's financial mismanagement, the UK Government inherited the largest structural deficit in Europe, which has left it paying debt interest equivalent to the cost of building one primary school a day in Scotland; recognises that there are no easy choices in the current economic climate but that the UK Government is lifting 90,000 people in Scotland on low incomes out of paying income tax altogether and has restored the pensions link with earnings to the benefit of one million Scottish pensioners; further recognises that spending on frontline public services in Scotland will be reduced by less than in England, Wales or Northern Ireland; regrets that the Scottish Government has still not published detailed spending plans beyond 2011-12 and believes that, by introducing a surprise new tax on business and failing to tackle high pay in the public sector, the Scottish Government is not making the right choices to boost Scotland's economic recovery and support frontline public services, but welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has abandoned its ambitions to emulate the Republic of Ireland, where the Green Party has recently voted in support of the harshest austerity budget on record."

The Presiding Officer: I call Linda Fabiani.

09:43

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): You caught me unawares, Presiding Officer, I am terribly sorry.

I am pleased to speak in the debate. I have a lot of sympathy with bits of the Green party motion. For example, land value taxation is worth exploring and I agree that the wealthier should pay more, which is why I am surprised that Opposition members do not agree with the supermarket levy. Considering that Sainsbury's makes £2.5 million per hour in the UK, I do not understand why that levy is such an issue for it. I also agree that the cuts that the UK Government has imposed have a disproportionate impact on poorer people.

I am afraid, however, that there we start to differ. For example, ending the council tax freeze now, which has been funded in each of the past three years, would cost Scotland's hard-pressed local taxpayers an extra £70 million in 2011-12 for a 3 per cent increase. I believe absolutely that the council tax freeze is good for Scotland.

Talking about taxation, I also have issues with what the Green party's motion says on the Scottish variable rate, because if it were used, the power to vary the rate of income tax would create a regressive tax that would hit lower-paid workers the hardest. The tax bill of someone on the minimum wage, for example, would increase by 15 per cent. That is why I am surprised, as I have said previously, to see the Green party calling for that tax to be imposed. It is all very well for Patrick Harvie to say that the Greens just want the power to be there—the power is there in legislation—but they have proposed using it, despite the fact that Patrick Harvie said only in September of last year that

"a form of tax-varying power was designed that makes it very difficult, although perhaps not impossible, to justify using it."—[*Official Report*, 9 September 2010; c 28401.]

In the context of taxation, the Labour amendment asks for

"the introduction of tax-raising powers recommended by the Calman Commission and contained in the Scotland Bill currently before the UK Parliament".

I was under the impression that the purpose of the Scotland Bill Committee was to consider how the best benefit for Scotland could be achieved. It seems to me that Labour members are predetermining the outcome of that process.

We face issues. It cannot be denied that times are hard, and I believe that it is incumbent on all of us in the Parliament and in the public services to think innovatively about how the best services can be delivered and who is best placed to meet the needs of their constituencies, whether geographic or thematic. We should strive to break down the institutional barriers that stymie progress on joint

working, and we should consider disposal of community assets to viable community groups that are best placed to tap their potential. I cite the campaign in East Kilbride to save the Hunter House Museum and the sterling local work of the voluntary East Kilbride Development Trust.

Across Scotland, people are working together for local benefit. I believe that every member of the Scottish Parliament should be working for national benefit in the difficult times that we are going through. I would like to see recognition across the chamber that there are some big issues that are sacrosanct and precious, and on which we should all be working together. Good work has been done in the Parliament through its committees and on its behalf by Scotland's Futures Forum. That is the kind of work that we should be looking at and pledging that we want to achieve. That is why, for me, John Swinney's amendment is the only one that we should be considering and working towards. It says that

"all parties in the Parliament should work to deliver a balanced budget that will safeguard services and strengthen economic growth for Scotland."

The Presiding Officer: I call Mary Mulligan, if she is ready to be called.

09:48

Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I am always ready, Presiding Officer.

I commend the Green party for its choices for debate this morning. I would have been just as content to take part in the debate on opportunities for young people, but better people than I will lead in that debate.

Members: No!

Mary Mulligan: Let me keep my comments to the debate in hand—protecting public services in Scotland.

I agree with Patrick Harvie's motion that

"the UK Government's cuts agenda is ideologically driven".

For the UK Government, the worldwide financial recession was not a disaster, but an opportunity. It is hiding behind the argument that we must balance the books to do what it wants instinctively to do, which is to reduce public services to the bare minimum. The Conservatives believe that the private sector can provide all the services that people need and that demand will set the price. They have not been in power for 12 months and already we have seen mass demonstrations on our streets because of their unfair and uncaring policies. Just this week, we have had to listen to David Cameron saying that he wants to reform the national health service when what he really wants

to do is to reduce it to being the provider of last resort.

As Mr Swinney said, the UK Government's cuts in public services are too hard, too deep and too fast to be purely a response to the financial situation. It knows that it might get only this one chance to implement them, and it is determined to do its best.

Derek Brownlee: The member questioned the coalition Government's commitment to the NHS in England, where it has protected NHS spending. The Opposition did not make such a pledge. Is it not the case that it is the Labour Party's policy that it would prefer to cut the NHS rather than the deficit?

Mary Mulligan: That is absolute rubbish and Mr Brownlee knows it. Everyone knows that we must tackle the deficit, but Labour does not agree with how the UK Government is doing that.

My colleague Michael McMahon has clearly outlined Labour's amendment, and I add my support for the call that the motion and our amendment make for discussions to ensure that this Parliament has the ability to vary the rate of income tax, although I agree with Mr McMahon that that might be easier said than done. I do not want to repeat the arguments on the issue, other than to say that apart from it being right for the Parliament to have such powers, we owe it, as Patrick Harvie said, to the people who voted for those powers in the referendum in 1997 to ensure that we are in a position to use them.

I also agree, of course, with Michael McMahon's comments on Calman, but in my final few minutes I want to focus on public services in Scotland, for which this Parliament has responsibility. Having criticised the Conservatives for their ideology, I want to put responsibility for the cuts across Scotland where it truly belongs—at the door of the SNP Government. No one should be in any doubt that the council tax freeze has contributed to councils cutting services, reducing their scope or increasing charges for them.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mary Mulligan: I am sorry, but there is not a lot of time in this morning's debates.

I am highly aware that Mr Swinney will claim that the Scottish Government has fully funded the council tax freeze. If that is the case, why, despite the increasing allocations over the past three years, have we seen councils continually cutting services further? Was Unison not correct when it told the Local Government and Communities Committee that the council tax freeze is depriving local authorities of much-needed revenue and should be abandoned?

It is not just service users who lose out. Those who provide services will suffer, too. The Fraser of Allander institute predicted that a reduction in the Scottish budget of 14 per cent by 2014-15 would lead to up to 126,000 job losses not just in the public sector, but in the private sector that provides services alongside it. Perhaps the Conservatives still think that unemployment is a price worth paying, but I am surprised that the SNP appears to agree.

Next week, we will have the opportunity to debate the SNP Government's budget. I know that Labour's proposals will be based on a firm commitment to protect and, indeed, promote public services.

09:52

Stewart Stevenson (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Michael McMahon rehearsed a very old calumny about the SNP's inability to work with Westminster. I put on record my gratitude for the letters from a UK Government minister and from three members of the Labour Party at Westminster that I received on my recent departure from office. That shows that I, for one, was able to work with Westminster, but I know that there is nothing unique about my experience. Early in my ministerial career, I met a UK Labour minister who said that after a considerable number of years in office, I was the first Scottish minister they had met. Co-operation is the name of the game, and the SNP knows how to play it.

I want to cover just two issues in my short contribution. The Green motion contains the phrase

"rejects the Scottish Government's decision simply to hand on these cuts to Scottish public services"

and goes on, essentially, to demand tax rises. A more "economically illiterate"—to use another phrase from the Green motion—approach would be hard to find.

Let us remind ourselves what tax powers we have, because the Calman powers, if they come at all, certainly will not be with us for years, nor would a land value tax, were we to conclude that we wanted such a thing. We can raise or lower the basic rate of income tax by 3p and we can tune the council tax, but raising taxes would not make the cuts go away. It would move them to cuts in personal incomes across Scotland, and it would not even do so in a progressive way. The council tax, in particular, hits the elderly hard. That is why we sought to build a coalition of interests in this place to replace it with a new, fair, income-determined tax.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I will give way to the member if he takes 10 seconds.

The Presiding Officer: We have some flexibility on time, Mr Stevenson.

Patrick Harvie: I understand the overall question of cuts versus taxes but I believe that it is possible to take a progressive approach that means that the poor pay less and the rich pay more, and that untaxed business assets pay their share, too. If the member does not accept that, surely he must accept that if we are not willing to raise revenue, we are handing on the cuts. The numbers do not add up any other way.

Stewart Stevenson: It is a question of who pays for the cuts. The cuts are the reality that the cabinet secretary and all members of this Parliament have to engage with. If we take an approach that takes money out of individuals' pockets, we affect the whole economy, diminish the prospect of economic recovery and prolong any difficulties that arise from the cuts. I will talk about business in a moment.

We know that the Green party is essentially an anti-growth party and taking money out of ordinary peoples' pockets would support that objective. I am not sure that it is a sure-fire election winner and, as Patrick Harvie said in his opening remarks, using the SVR is unlikely to be popular. It would certainly create difficulties.

My second point is about business rates. Again, screwing down on business would support the anti-growth agenda. If we were to tinker with business in the wrong way and unravel the huge amount of support that we have given to small business—a vigorous small business sector is the very heartbeat of our economy—we would find ourselves in difficulties.

In recent weeks, the Green party has been rehearsing the idea of introducing a tax on empty properties. Let us look at the effect that that tax has had south of the border. Properties are being demolished and roofs are being taken down, because the burden on a shrinking business with a fixed cost associated with its property leads to such behaviour. It is hardly green to destroy property that could be brought back into use at a later date. That will not improve the economy and it is not the kind of response that will help us to grow our way out of the difficulties that we are in.

This debate has been timely because we are in the run-up to next week's stage 1 debate on the budget, but I fear that the Greens' proposals to increase taxes are simply a road that would make things more difficult, not less.

09:56

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): Patrick Harvie is right to be concerned about how we protect public services. However, as I have said in all the debates about the economy in which I have taken part during the past few months, I continue to be concerned about the premise of the base from which we seem to start such discussions. There seems to be a wish for us not to talk about the economic fundamentals of why we are here and what we are trying to address. Unless I have misunderstood, when the world's economy crashed, we had reached the same point that we had reached in every single economic crash: the point at which values were unsustainable. This particular crash had a lot to do with property values fuelling economic and banking activity to unprecedented levels, sustained by properties that did not back the transaction.

When that happens, it is more honest for politicians to acknowledge that the totality of the economy has to readjust to match the changing circumstances. That means that the private sector will have to contract and readjust and, as a concomitant, we must accept that the public sector has to do likewise. We cannot just get out a bicycle pump and try to reinflate the economy to its previous level because, by the simple laws of supply and demand, that previous level has been shown to be unsustainable.

I find very difficult, and have found difficult, those speeches in the debate this morning and previously that assume that we can protect everything that we have because nothing has changed. That is not reality, and that is the situation that the Westminster Government is trying to address. It is certainly not sustainable for us to be spending taxpayers' money at the rate of a primary school a day, as Jeremy Purvis pointed out, on interest payments. That is not in the best interests of sustaining and protecting public services. It cannot be described fairly as "economically illiterate" to address a structural deficit and recognise its consequences for the public purse and, more important, for the value and quality of services that are available to the public.

With all due respect to Patrick Harvie, if any speech or proposition that was made this morning was thirled to an ideology, his speech was thirled to the ideology that we can replace missing revenue by increasing taxation. I do not think that that matches the economic circumstances that we face. There is a legitimate argument about how, in changed economic circumstances, we can protect public services, but the Liberal Democrats must disagree with the proposition that we can fill the gap in its entirety by adjusting and raising all forms of taxation. That does not meet our requirements.

We face structural deficits and we need to make structural changes if we are to make a difference that will be sustainable in the longer run. That is at the heart of protecting public services. Unless we can put our finances on a course that can endure year on year, we cannot properly develop and grow public services. If we aspire to the previous illusory levels of finance, the bubble will burst yet again. I think that we are all committed to seeing that that does not happen. We do not wish to go through the pain again.

People keep telling me how disappointed they are that house prices are not rising fast enough. Why? Surely that is what took us into this trouble. Do we not understand that difficulty? It is painful for those who are in those circumstances, but we cannot go on using glib political phrases as if we can simply return to where we were three years ago and all will be well. All was not well, which is in why we are in our current predicament.

My colleague Jeremy Purvis clearly outlined alternatives that could allow us to reduce the total quantum of the public purse without directly impacting on vital front-line public services. That balance is difficult to achieve and no party will find it easy. We might agree or disagree about the elements of the situation, but our nation faces difficult financial times and we all have the same problem. Different fiscal powers and monitoring will not remove the problem. We would have had it, we have got it and we have to address it. We should not delude the public by telling them otherwise.

10:04

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): The Green party motion before us today is somewhat unbalanced. It is a motion that stores up great anger for the United Kingdom Government and what the Greens describe as the "cuts agenda", with no recognition of the size of the national debt or the deficit that the UK Government has been faced with. It is a structural deficit, which means that even in the good times we spent more money than we brought in in taxation, and a deficit in the current year that means that we will have to borrow more than £140 billion more than we collect in revenue.

For those who say that the process is too fast, too quick and too deep—such as the Labour Party and Scottish National Party—the question remains: what would not be too fast or too deep? At least the Green party has answered that fundamental question by saying that it would plug the gap with an increase in taxation. The other main parties continually refuse to say how they would do that. Mary Mulligan even said that everything has been done in the name of balancing the books, as if balancing the books

was somehow a bad thing. I suggest that balancing the books is a pretty critical thing for the Government to do.

We are faced with a choice: either the UK Government reduces the deficit on the UK's terms or ultimately we have the terms imposed on us by outside forces and the markets. We are spending ridiculous amounts of money on interest payments—Jeremy Purvis coined the phrase “a primary school a day” to describe the situation. If we do not reduce the deficit, it will be far more than a primary school a day. The interest payments would spike, and we would be spending even more money on interest than on public services.

Mary Mulligan: What is Gavin Brown's view of the amount that we now have to pay in unemployment benefit because of the job losses that are a result of his Government's policies?

Gavin Brown: Mary Mulligan seems to have wiped the slate clean in May 2010 by suggesting that unemployment did not exist for the last year and a half of the Government that she supported. The rate is actually lower today than it was for a large portion of the end part of the Labour Government's time in office. We will take no lessons from the Labour Party on that.

Let me turn to the other part of the Green motion—the idea that by simply thrusting taxes on the people of Scotland we will improve the economy and make the country better. Leaving aside the part of the motion that suggests that all the changes should be made to the “draft budget”—I do not know whether Patrick Harvie wants that to happen by stage 1 or whether he is giving the cabinet secretary the flexibility of waiting until stage 2 or stage 3 to introduce the taxes—I question seriously whether any economic analysis has been done on the proposed hotel bed tax that Patrick Harvie wants to introduce. Has he spoken to the country's tourism businesses?

We want to encourage people to come to Scotland to improve our tourism industry. Would imposing a hotel bed tax at the drop of a hat encourage tourists to come here? When the issue was considered by the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee two years ago, every party on the committee voted against the concept of a bed tax. I am pleased to say that that vote was endorsed by Mr Mather at the time, and the Scottish Government reaffirmed only two weeks ago that it is a poor idea for our tourism industry and our economy as a whole.

What analysis has the Green party done on the land value tax? Does it seriously propose that the tax ought to be imposed this year, as it suggests in the motion? What effect would that have on stability and the confidence of the people of

Scotland? If it is to raise an extra £1.5 billion, as the Greens suggest, it would put a heavy taxation burden on the people of Scotland.

At least the Greens have suggested how they would attempt to plug the deficit. They ought to be credited for that; other parties have completely ignored the question. However, I fear that the Greens' suggestions—particularly the proposals to impose a land value tax and throw in a hotel bed tax, too—would damage our economy and be bad in the longer term.

10:09

Michael McMahon: When closing speeches are made at the end of our debates, the term “interesting” is often used euphemistically to describe the course that the debate has followed. As we move closer to the election, I am sure that a more accurate description of how debates pan out will be “predictable”. We may be just far enough away from the election for this debate to have been more interesting than predictable, but there was an awful lot of the expected in what we heard rather than anything very enlightening.

I note, however, how brave and commendable it is of the Liberal Democrats to put forward an amendment and argument that remind people that they are currently in bed with the Tories and playing their part in destroying jobs and services across Scotland. What we got from the Conservatives was possibly more predictable, and it just confirmed to us all why they remain such an anathema to the Scottish electorate.

Let me turn to the comments of Gavin Brown and come to the defence of my colleague Mary Mulligan. When she used the phrase “balancing the books”, she did not say that that was a bad thing. She said that it is not enough to hide behind such a phrase to follow ideological preferences. That is an important point.

As I heard Mr Brown and Mr Brownlee speak, I was reminded of an anecdote that my son gave me a few weeks ago. In his place of work, a few people were sitting around, having their lunch and ruminating on the current difficulties in the economy, when one of the younger members of staff piped up, “Can you tell me who this Mary Thatcher was?” I am pretty sure that Mr Brownlee and Mr Brown were not quite the children of Thatcher, but it is clear from the way that they have expressed themselves today that they are definitely the grandchildren of Thatcher. They know exactly who she was and what her ideology was, and they are clearly attuned to it.

Even having followed the Conservatives' ideological arguments, I was amused to hear Mr Brownlee's defence of the council tax freeze. To claim that £70 million was in fact too much to pay

for the freeze was laughable—in fact, Mr Swinney found himself in difficulty in trying not to laugh as he tried to explain that away. The reality is that there are enough reports that show the opposite. Mary Mulligan referred to the report from Unison, but there are others, including from the independent budget review group, which said that the council tax freeze is unsustainable.

Derek Brownlee: The independent budget review did not say that the council tax freeze was underfunded. If the Labour Party is saying that the council tax freeze is a bad thing, perhaps it could tell us by how much it would like council tax to increase.

Michael McMahon: The member was clearly not listening to my opening comments, when I said that the policy of freezing the council tax was not, of itself, a bad thing. However, it was underfunded and it led to cuts.

That brings me to Stewart Stevenson's points. He asked who is paying for the cuts. I can tell him who is paying for the cuts: the elderly people who are charged more for the services that they require at a local government level, the children who are losing their breakfast clubs and youth facilities, and the disabled. A whole host of people are losing services and paying for the cuts, which can be followed back to the council tax freeze and the underfunding of it.

Some old axioms are worth repeating in debates, and Patrick Harvie's motion does that by rightly pointing out that the Scottish variable rate was democratically endorsed by the Scottish people. However, he could have gone further and recognised that devolution is also the path chosen for Scotland by its people. This Administration has wasted four years campaigning for something that this country does not want, rather than governing on behalf of Scotland to deliver what it actually wants.

Mr Harvie is right to point out that the SNP, by simply passing on the Tory-led Government's cuts, is undermining housing, public transport and energy efficiency. However, all those were under threat before the recession because the Scottish Government has always had the wrong priorities. All talk and no action; overpromising and underdelivering—that has been the hallmark of the Scottish Government. It has been too busy being populist, putting its party interest before the public good, and generally exhibiting such incompetence that I am left to wonder why the Greens have any confidence whatsoever in the Scottish Government's ability to act in good faith or do the right thing on any issue, let alone work with Westminster.

As others have said, there is much that can be agreed with in Patrick Harvie's motion but, while I

confirm my admiration for the Green party's optimism, ultimately I cannot support it.

10:14

John Swinney: Mr McMahon was generous to the Green party in complimenting its optimism. Being optimistic is not a charge that we could level at Mr McMahon about many things, particularly after that speech.

Mr McMahon accused me of laughing when Mr Brownlee suggested not only that the council tax freeze has been properly and fully funded but that, at stages, it has provided a windfall for local authorities. Mr McMahon must have confused for laughter the generally cheery disposition that I bring to the Parliament, which my colleagues know well. Mr Brownlee is arithmetically correct. The council tax freeze fund was set at £70 million, which represents a 3.2 per cent increase in the council tax. At different stages over the course of the past three years of the council tax freeze, inflation has not been 3.2 per cent, so Mr Brownlee's point is absolutely correct. I wanted to put that on the record, along with a reference to my generally cheery disposition.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: On the subject of cheery dispositions, who better to give way to than Mr Purvis?

Jeremy Purvis: I will ask my question with a smile on my face.

I believe that the Government has committed to a council tax freeze for the coming two years. Given where inflation stands at the moment, will £70 million be enough for that?

John Swinney: As Mr Purvis knows, we have set a budget for one year. That budget is being considered by the Parliament, and those are the numbers that are before it. If Mr Purvis looks at the position over the period of the spending review, he will see that Mr Brownlee's point is valid, and the council tax freeze remains properly funded.

I do not want to give Mr McMahon a sense that I will talk only about his speech—I will move on to others in a moment—but he accused the Government of not governing in the interests of the people. I have to assure him that I spend all my time considering how best we can take decisions to meet the aspirations and needs of the people of Scotland.

Mary Mulligan's speech disappointed me because, in commenting on unemployment and castigating the United Kingdom Government for its economic performance, at no stage did she record the fact that unemployment is actually falling in

Scotland. Yesterday, we saw that employment is at a higher level than in the rest of the UK, that economic inactivity is at a lower rate than the rest of the UK, and that unemployment in Scotland is falling, whereas it is rising in the rest of the UK. We also saw that there is economic growth in the Scottish economy. Those are positive indicators of a direction of travel that is correct and appropriate for the people of Scotland.

Michael McMahon: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: I give way to Mr McMahon.

Michael McMahon: I thank the cabinet secretary for giving me an opportunity to remind him of the comments made by the director of the Confederation of British Industry Scotland this morning, who said that the Government really should not be congratulating itself given the state of the economy and the direction in which it is travelling.

John Swinney: To be honest, the comments of the director of CBI Scotland sound more appropriate as the pejorative remarks of a political opponent rather than the dispassionate comments of a business and industry leader. On the question of unemployment, there is a need for people to talk constructively about the fact that we are moving in the right direction on the economic indicators. That will be beneficial to the Scottish economy.

At the heart of the budget proposals that the Scottish Government has set out and what we have said we want to do is the protection of front-line services and the promotion of economic recovery. We recognise that those two objectives are the objectives of the people of Scotland and they want them to be undertaken for the benefit of their communities. The decisions have flown through into the budget, whether through the protection of health expenditure in our localities, which is an economic multiplier and has an economic impact in every single community in Scotland, or due to the fact that the reductions in local authority budgets have been lower than the average reductions in the public sector in Scotland, thereby protecting to an extent the resources that are available to local authorities. Those are the practical manifestations of the decisions that the Scottish Government has taken to ensure that front-line services are protected.

We have to strike a balance in our proposals between balancing the budget through spending reductions and increasing the revenue that is available to the Scottish Government. That is why I have taken the difficult decision to recommend to the Parliament the increase in business rates for the large retail sector. However, that sector can afford to contribute to the business rates pot. The

increase will help us to deliver £200 million-worth of reductions through the business rate poundage, which will help us to deliver the small business bonus that is so vital to our town centres. To those who criticise the supermarket levy but also demand that we do things to support the small business community in Scotland, I simply say this: if they want us to ensure effective support for the small business community in Scotland, I encourage them to support the Government's supermarket levy, which will deliver increased revenue and benefits to the public purse in Scotland.

10:20

Patrick Harvie: John Swinney began by expressing sympathy for my core argument that the UK cuts are on the wrong scale and at the wrong time, and that they are socially damaging. He described them as going too far and too fast in reducing the public debt. I argue that the UK Government is focusing too much on cuts and not enough on raising tax progressively and fairly, including from the private sector.

For decades, we have had the lie in UK politics that we can have European standards of public services and pay American levels of tax. That lie cannot last any longer. It is clear that the UK coalition wants American levels of both. I think that Scotland would rather go a different way. If we do not do that, it will raise the question, what is the Parliament here for if we are only willing to pass on the cuts? If John Swinney intends to play the role of the pre-devolution Scottish secretary, acting as the UK's man in Edinburgh, he will be making a great mistake. He will greatly regret coming to be seen as George Osborne's man in Edinburgh.

Michael McMahon and Stewart Stevenson both expressed understandable concern that any tax increases would hit hardest the pockets of ordinary people. That is a concern and we should take it seriously, but such tax rises are not the only choice for raising revenue. The Scotland Act 1998 gives us the power to raise revenue to fund local services. It does not say that that has to be done through the council tax or that it has to hit ordinary households the hardest. The two examples that I mentioned, which cover untaxed business assets, should be part of the mix. Even changing the council tax to add upper bands would affect only the wealthiest. We should be exploring all those options.

Derek Brownlee reminded me of one of my most serious slips of the tongue. I am not sure, but I might have been tired and emotional on the day when I described him as progressive. He reminded me of that, then he suggested that I should follow Hazel Blears's example. Perhaps he

is working to a different definition of progressive from the one that I use. He also expressed concern about the impact of tax rises, but he seems oblivious to the impact that the cuts to services will have on the poorest and most vulnerable people in society.

Jeremy Purvis talked about the scale of the deficit. I can only assume that he fully endorses the UK Government's policy to shift the burden to individuals, for example by writing off corporate tax bills and refusing to restore progressive income tax. He was particularly keen not to have his rant about Comhaontas Glas, the Green Party in Ireland, interrupted, despite the questions that he directed at me. It is strange that he lodged an amendment that welcomes the fact that the Government is talking less about Ireland these days but then used most of his speech to talk about Ireland.

I can only assume that, in holding me to account for the actions of Comhaontas Glas, despite my having no formal links with it, he is keen to be held fully to account for all the actions of the UK coalition, or indeed for those of any political party anywhere in the world with the word "liberal" in its name. Perhaps he would like me to hold him responsible for the actions of the German Free Democratic Party, which is also in coalition with the right wing and whose popularity is in free fall. It is trying to force through tax cuts and ban the burqa—an illiberal position that it shares with the Dutch liberals the VVD, or the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, which is sharing Government with the racist party of Geert Wilders. Perhaps he would not like to be held to account for those actions, though.

Ross Finnie said that my speech suggested that I was thirled to an ideology. I do not think that ideology is a dirty word in politics. It has been missing from our managerial politics for far too long. The question, though, is what ideology? Is it the free-market fixation that has failed us so badly or something different, which, I think, is what Scots wanted when they set up this place? I agree entirely with Mr Finnie's comments on the folly of chasing rising property prices, but they suggest that he should be supporting our land value tax proposals.

I remind the chamber that the cause of the deficit and the recession was market failure of historic proportions, yet the victims of the cuts will be ordinary citizens and communities. Mary Mulligan said that the right took the financial crisis as an opportunity; in fact, the left, too, should have taken it as an opportunity to challenge and overturn the failed socially and environmentally destructive and brutally unfair deregulated free market ideology that has been dominant in this country for far too long now. That opportunity

could still be taken; after all, Labour and the SNP both compete for a centre-left profile. This Parliament should be capable of ensuring that Scotland's politics forge a successful and strong left response to the current situation. Of course, parties have to compete, but they should do so by setting out progressive and constructive ideas instead of simply blaming one another for the cuts while doing nothing about them.

In my opening speech, I listed the other topics that we could have brought for debate—education, health, jobs, housing, poverty and inequality—and said that each would have been overshadowed by the cuts. However, I go further and say that each cut will restore the giant evils that Sir William Beveridge identified: want, squalor, disease, ignorance and idleness. Even if today's language has changed, the fact is that the cuts will revive those giant evils and, indeed, will make them worse. A generation that had to cope with massive deficit and debt built up the welfare state and we should not permit the Cameron generation to use this opportunity to tear it down. If we do, we again beg the question of what we are actually here for.

Young People (Opportunities)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7737, in the name of Robin Harper, on opportunities for young people.

10:27

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): It gives me great pleasure, in my last Green party debate in this chamber, to focus on opportunities for young people, although I have to say that it is a matter of regret that, nearly 12 years after this Parliament was established, so many young people are still living in poverty in Scotland. That said, since devolution, some progress has been made for our young people and there have been successes of which this Parliament can genuinely be proud.

However, I believe that the creation of a Scottish youth microcredit scheme would be an innovative and influential way of helping to tackle the poverty that continues to hold our younger generation back. Indeed, there is probably never going to be a more pressing or urgent time to give attention to that important issue.

Many of our most vulnerable young people have already fallen through the safety net. They are not in education or on a training scheme; they are struggling financially with no support or assistance because of their age; and they are unable to find a job, especially in the challenging job market that they face just now. Around 36,000 young people—or more than the entire population of Stirling—are in precisely that situation in Scotland.

Our young people's future is now being threatened by the most regressive and severe cuts to public and welfare services that their generation will ever see. I cannot—and will not—accept that situation. Throughout my years of teaching young people and working and campaigning with and for them, I have seen that they are simply fizzing with ideas and energy, ready for their latent talents to be recognised, seeking to be supported and allowed to flourish, ready and willing to work hard, ready to play their part in society and ready to make their contribution to building a better world.

Nobel prize winner Muhammad Yunus recognised that in Bangladesh. He recognised the creative drive and latent energy in his own communities and was inspired to find new ways for people living in poverty, especially Bangladeshi women, to access affordable finance as a means of starting up small businesses and social enterprises and breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The end result was Grameen Bank, of which I know many members are aware. That novel form of entrepreneurial

support has spread throughout the world, including the United States, and is now coming to Scotland.

Instead of seeing a substantial and growing number of our young people languishing in unemployment, we could be providing them with the supports that they need. We could be encouraging the most vulnerable young people I have described to start up small-scale retail operations, small urban food-growing initiatives or any other entrepreneurial activities that they see as an opportunity for self-employment.

To that end, we believe that a £2 million fund—which, as even the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth will agree, is a tiny sum in the great scheme of things—half of which would come from Scottish Government funds and half of which would be matched funding from business, would provide a solid start for a Scottish youth microcredit scheme for this group of young people. The experience of Grameen Bank suggests that such microcredit schemes have a very low default rate, which means that the fund would quickly become largely self-financing and could subsequently be expanded to support older participants.

We would not be starting from scratch. Scotland has a long and proud history of entrepreneurial achievement. We have inspirational figures—many of them, including Tom Farmer, from the world of business—who have shown a real commitment to helping the younger generation, and we have projects, such as those from the Prince's Trust and Inspiring Scotland, that have demonstrated that it can be done.

We should congratulate business chambers such as Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce on starting the young enterprise guide programme, which is aimed at 16 to 24-year-olds—and is about to celebrate its second birthday—for successfully helping numbers of young people from all over Edinburgh to get into self-employment and start their own business. We should not forget the work of the enterprise and entrepreneurial schools programmes—many of which I have visited—that have been going for many years and have had such great success in encouraging our young people's independence and self-confidence. Finally, I warmly welcome the work done by Glasgow Caledonian University to establish a Grameen bank in Scotland and to create a team of committed academics to monitor the progress of the microfinance scheme. We need to build on that enthusiasm and the entrepreneurial foundations that have already been set in Scotland and grow from having some projects here and some there to a national scheme that can learn from the successes of the internationally proven Grameen model.

I look forward to hearing from the minister a commitment to explore ways of establishing a Scottish youth microcredit scheme and to provide affordable loans and entrepreneurial mentoring on a Grameen-type basis for vulnerable young people right across Scotland. I know that at a meeting with Muhammad Yunus last summer, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth offered a commitment to do all that he could to support Grameen programmes in Scotland, and I give him an opportunity to restate that commitment and explore a scheme that is specifically aimed at vulnerable young people.

I am sure that members throughout the chamber agree with me that it is not just young people themselves who pay the price for a lack of opportunities; the whole of Scottish society pays the same price.

I move,

That the Parliament commends the work of Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus in founding, in 1976, the Grameen Bank, which provides microfinance for people living in poverty in Bangladesh; recognises that, since its beginnings in Bangladesh, there are now Grameen-type programmes tackling poverty across 38 countries around the world and that Grameen America is now branching out to many new locations in New York, Nebraska, Washington DC and California; believes that there is an opportunity to tackle the growing problem of unemployment among 16 to 19-year-olds with the establishment of a microcredit scheme for young people in Scotland; notes that this scheme could offer loans for small business ventures to young people who are not in education, employment or training and be supported by an entrepreneurial mentoring scheme; further believes that such a scheme would build on the contribution made by Scotland's social enterprise sector and draw on Scotland's long history of entrepreneurial achievement, and calls on the Scottish Government to explore ways to establish a Scottish youth microcredit scheme.

10:34

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): As a minister and a father, I applaud Robin Harper for his persistent and consistent view on this matter and for bringing this debate to the Parliament. After all, tackling youth unemployment is a top priority for this Government. History tells us that recession hits young people the hardest—they have been the first to lose their jobs and the last to benefit from the upturn—and that in such times, those who are furthest from the labour market, who in the best of times find it hard to get a job, get pushed back even further.

Moreover, frequent and long spells of unemployment for young people do lasting damage. In short, it can take a long time for young people to recover from a recession. Even today, some people who were affected by the recession in the 1980s are still paying a price. That is

unacceptable, and we must not let it happen again. The issue is also one for the United Kingdom Government and other western Governments, given that there have been recessions in 1973 to 1975, 1980 to 1982, 1990 to 1992 and 2000, with the collapse of the internet bubble. The latest monumental manifestation struck in 2008.

We need concerted measures that learn from the likes of Minsky, who believed that our economic system is much less stable than it ought to be and that it produces much higher levels of instability than it should. We need measures that work and categorically remove the suspicion that asset bubbles, bouts of inflation, all-too-frequent recessions and subsequent stock market bounces advantage market speculators at the expense of the real economy, its competitiveness and future generations of young people. Such measures would tackle the core problem and help what we are doing with the powers at our disposal. We are putting in place a comprehensive package of employment and skills measures to tackle the symptoms and alleviate the real pressures that our young people are facing by complementing and building on an existing wide range of services and support for young people.

On the focus of the motion, the Government has a first-class track record on support for youth entrepreneurship. We start young. Our determined to succeed strategy for enterprise in education has entrepreneurial learning as a key strand of activity and £66 million in investment over the life of the Government. Delivered through the curriculum for excellence, the strategy engages directly with young people in primary 1 through to further education to ensure that they have an understanding of both the theory and practice of entrepreneurship. We have also developed a range of resources and materials that are aimed at engaging teachers and learners in developing an enthusiasm for and an understanding of private, social and co-operative enterprises to inform career choices that embrace the concept of entrepreneurialism.

We do much of our work in partnership. We have supported the work and development of the Co-operative Education Trust Scotland's co-operate to succeed educational resources, and we have supported the Social Enterprise Academy to train teachers. We have also encouraged schools to pursue social enterprise schools status.

Local authorities are central to the approach. Through their efforts and with our support, there are now nearly 20,000 partnerships between schools and employers throughout Scotland. Through those partnerships, young people are increasingly understanding the relevance of their learning to the world of work. They are getting

opportunities to see how French contributes to exporting, how English and maths combine to make a business case, and how team building and problem solving are essential attributes of even the smallest business. Our young people are thriving in that environment and demonstrating what many of us recognise as their innate and very Scottish entrepreneurial spirit.

The key message therefore has to be that Scotland's new generation Y is well equipped. Young people are increasingly business savvy and information technology literate. They are able to use technology as digital native speakers. Those attributes and their desire for an ethical and environmentally sound future will make them challenging to employ, but who else can sell to and meet the needs of generation Y and who else can connect Scottish businesses to the other generation Y youngsters in the other 199 countries on the planet and their 7 billion people?

In addition, they have the obvious option of self-employment. Opportunities for people to start up in business, at whatever stage in life, can be fraught with real challenges. Access to finance has been and remains vital for people who want to start a business, and some of those who cannot get the money that they need from traditional sources—the banks—are finding things tough. Therefore, we welcome the strategic partnership between Grameen Bank and Glasgow Caledonian University and their efforts to establish a branch of Grameen Bank in the UK. It is clear that there are several issues to resolve in replicating the successes that Grameen Bank has enjoyed elsewhere, but some mainstream banks can take lessons from Banco Real in São Paulo, for example, which is blending the Grameen model with the traditional commercial banking approach.

I commend the role of the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust in offering a package of support to young people throughout Scotland who are considering starting their own business and cannot secure funding elsewhere. Those people are normally aged between 18 and 25. In the past three years, the PSYBT has directly assisted more than 2,000 young people to set up some 1,850 businesses, which is a great achievement. Good initiatives are also coming forward from many other quarters as many more people locally and nationally realise that combined effort is needed and that we need a Scottish blend that works for Scotland. I will talk more about that in a moment.

We had no hesitation in addressing the specific challenges that last summer's leavers from schools, colleges and universities faced. We invested more than £400,000 in a new entrepreneurial programme that recognises the importance of entrepreneurship to the Scottish economy. Currently, Young Enterprise Scotland

and the PSYBT are working with young people to give them insights into self-employment and the basic skills and information that they need to start a business and a placement with a local entrepreneur.

Most recently, in December, I announced that there was more than £6.6 million of European funding to provide advice and support to small businesses and entrepreneurs, and to help to create more than 7,000 jobs, some of which will be targeted at young people. That approach will work alongside the business gateway to provide a tailored package of coaching and mentoring assistance to some 1,700 young people over the next three years, which will assist with harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit of young people and contribute to more young business ambassadors being profiled as role models. That should lead to sustainable increases in self-employment activity. Young entrepreneurs will act as role models and mentors and inspire the emerging future generations of young entrepreneurs.

The extended business gateway services throughout Scotland, with management transferred to local authorities, should allow more people to access not only the business gateway services but the wider economic development support that our local authorities deliver. It is important that the PSYBT continues to work closely with the business gateway to build on existing relationships and strengthen and develop services to assist more young people who wish to consider setting up in business as a viable option.

We have had very good sessions recently in which all the players have been brought together under the umbrella of the PSYBT to address how utilities, regulators, business organisations, the accountancy profession, colleges and so on can come together to get a better result. On the basis of this debate, we will go back to that approach to see what we can do. We will look at young people as a specific target audience, and specifically at utilising the skills that Robin Harper and I are passionate about and which we know can be harnessed in order to help the debate that we had yesterday about how we can internationalise Scotland and connect with future generations in many other countries.

I move amendment S3M-7737.1, to insert at end:

"building on the excellent work by the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust in providing microfinance for business start-ups to 18 to 25-year-olds, the work of Glasgow Caledonian University in establishing a partnership with the Grameen Bank to develop the Grameen Caledonian Creative Lab and a Grameen Bank in Scotland and other organisations making a proactive effort and their own contributions in common cause."

10:42

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): I am delighted to take part in the debate. I find myself following Mr Harper and Mr Mather, neither of whom is returning to the Parliament in May. I hope that it is not catching.

I am pleased that we have listening in the gallery some of the young people of Scotland as we debate issues that affect them.

Reducing poverty through microfinance banking is not just for developing economies, so Labour members whole-heartedly welcome what the Nobel peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus and his Grameen Bank promote. The Labour Party has supported that for a while—Gordon Brown sat down with Muhammad Yunus to discuss plans for Africa in 2008. President Barack Obama is also a big supporter. If it is good enough for Barack Obama and Gordon Brown, it is certainly good enough for me.

We welcome the creation of the Yunus centre for social business and health at Glasgow Caledonian University. The focus there on the impact of microfinance and related issues on health and on the lives of disadvantaged communities in Glasgow and overseas is a step forward.

Last year, Muhammad Yunus mentioned coming to Scotland in July to start talks about a branch of the Grameen Bank in Scotland. He said:

“Glasgow wanted Grameen Scotland. There are big problems in the city, with thousands of families in three generations of unemployment because of the welfare system. I said to them, a social business should be created to take ten people out of welfare and if it works, repeat it, and take all people out of the welfare system. In July I will go there and start talks.”

I am pleased that the minister mentioned that those talks are progressing.

We should move away from the notion that microfinance banking is just for developing countries. It is good to see that, in 2009, the first United States branch of the Grameen Bank lent \$1.5 million dollars. That lending ranged from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars to nearly 600 women with small business plans in the New York City borough of Queens.

As we have heard, social enterprise is already alive and well in Scotland. Grameen street fairs, where American borrowers sell their goods, ranging from food and flowers to clothes and jewellery, are not dissimilar to farmers markets in my constituency and others throughout Scotland.

As the minister and Mr Harper mentioned, schools run social enterprise programmes, which should be encouraged. The issue is how we harness the interest that the children have in the

entrepreneurial sphere and translate it into the workforce. As we heard yesterday, youth unemployment is at its highest level for a generation in the United Kingdom. Surely if youngsters cannot get jobs, they should be encouraged to create their own.

Microcredit emphasises building the capacity of micro-entrepreneurs, employment generation, building trust and giving help during difficult times. As a tool for socioeconomic development, it can be very effective, but it is not without its risks. The idea of a Scottish youth microcredit scheme is plausible, but it comes down to funding. As Mr Harper said, a mere £2 million is all that it would require, but the start-up money would need to be found to administer the loans and to employ staff to provide support.

Next week, in Edinburgh, the young enterprise guide project will hold its second annual celebration of successfully helping young people to start in business. The event at Craigmillar business incubator project will showcase the achievements of young people from all over Edinburgh who have been assisted into self-employment and in starting their own businesses. It is aimed at young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in employment, education or training, and the project is delivered by Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the business gateway and the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust.

It is not happening just in Edinburgh; schemes operate throughout Scotland and offer positive options for young people who are facing the grim prospect of unemployment. The idea of a Scottish youth microcredit system is welcome, but someone needs to provide one-to-one support to the young people at all stages of business development from the initial generation of ideas through to business planning, funding and aftercare support.

Since July 2009, approximately 520 young people have engaged with Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, of whom 245 have so far started a business or become self-employed with the help of the project.

Large employers, such as the much-maligned Royal Bank of Scotland, work alongside charities such as the PSYBT. The RBS group's relationship with the PSYBT has been refocused and is now concentrated on those who are described as being hardest to reach. In 2009, 46 RBS employees provided direct support to young entrepreneurs across Scotland either as volunteer panel members or as aftercare advisers with PSYBT.

As we have heard, Scottish Enterprise also operates a microcredit programme to enable more young people to address the issues of starting or

developing a business. Its microcredit provides low-cost flexible loans, as well as help and support to enable businesses to start up and develop more effectively.

All those initiatives are welcome if we are to grow Scotland's economy and support its social enterprise sector.

I move amendment S3M-7737.2, to insert at end:

"by discussing this idea with the Scottish League of Credit Unions and the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust".

10:48

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I do not like to admit it, but it is more than a quarter of a century since I last sat in a university economics lecture. It is also over a quarter of a century since I was a young student teacher at Boroughmuir high school, where Robin Harper was a teacher of modern studies. The pupils said that they liked Robin Harper very much and that he was a terrific teacher, and that they liked best his colourful ties. Some things do not change. Likewise, some things do not change in economics. Certain principles stay very much the same: first, unemployment is bad; secondly, productivity is good; and, thirdly, individuals have the potential to be the greatest asset of any country.

Our hearts sink when we hear that the Scottish unemployment rate is rising three times faster than that in England, that the percentage of unemployed school leavers has risen by more than a percentage point in the last five years, that Scotland's productivity rate is almost 5 per cent lower than the UK average, and that we have an education system that still, despite all its assets, fails properly to equip too many of our school leavers with the skills and knowledge that employers demand, and which pressures too many young people to go to university because there are not sufficient opportunities available for a non-university-based education. Indeed, that last point has become my party's clarion call because it has identified the issue as being a fundamental problem that must be addressed if we are to claim that we are genuinely concerned about the economic and social advancement of Scotland. That is why I welcome the opportunity to debate Robin Harper's motion, which has rightly identified the growing problem of unemployment among 16 to 19-year-olds.

Although I can agree with the general tone of the motion, it is our view that if we want to deliver the best possible opportunities for young people, there needs to be a more diverse range of opportunities even before they reach the age of

16. As far as we are concerned, there should be a clearly defined two-route system from 14 onwards, in which young people are able to choose the form and type of education that they would like to continue, be it largely skills based or more weighted in favour of academic pursuits. That demands that young people receive improved and much more varied advice in careers departments.

That system has been proved to be incredibly successful in countries such as Denmark and Germany. Those are countries where youth unemployment is lower than it is in Scotland, predominantly because their young people have become much better at defining their career paths and are better equipped with business skills. Nora Senior, who is vice-chairman of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, said recently at a conference that

"there needs to be a whole-scale change to the way we talk about vocational and academic qualifications".

I acknowledge the Scottish Government's attempt to take that further. It is a view that has also been endorsed by Angela Knight, who is chief executive of the British Bankers Association. She rightly suggests that we will go much further if we improve the quality of the careers advice that we give to young people as early as secondary 1 and S2, so that they are given sufficient access to all the information that they need to make an informed choice.

Quite simply, if we as parliamentarians and Scots want to maximise the opportunities of our young people, it is not good enough to continue with the mediocre status quo of channelling all our children through a one-size-fits-all school system; an education, I suggest, for which they may in some cases have neither the inclination nor the aptitude to take best advantage. They have, however, other aptitudes, which would be much better utilised if they were given a different focus. The myth remains—it is a myth—that university is always a better place to be for fulfilling career aspirations.

If we want change, we must ensure that we are offering our school pupils a wider range of options at an earlier age—options that are flexible and which are backed up with the requisite support.

My colleague Gavin Brown will make comments about a Scottish youth microcredit scheme and how to engender a more entrepreneurial spirit. Any system that aspires to make entrepreneurs and wealth creators out of our young people is always worth a second look and, as Robin Harper rightly said, it is very much part of Scotland's distinguished tradition. However, entrepreneurs need vision, they need direction and—crucially, I suggest—they need to possess the requisite skills and acumen to make the most of business.

I was interested this week to hear the Law Society of Scotland make strong recommendations that classes on legal issues, rights and responsibilities should be on offer in Scottish schools. That is a similar theme to the one that has been pursued in petition PE1354, which has been brought to the Scottish Parliament by the campaigner Stewart MacKenzie. The same can be said for classes on financial management and entrepreneurship.

That is why it is imperative that we make the changes that we have suggested in the debate. It is not enough, as the comparative evidence on microfinance suggests, to provide handouts while hoping that miracles will occur. Politicians need to show leadership.

10:52

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): The debate is welcome and we are supportive of the concept of microfinance and, indeed, of entrepreneurial education as a whole. We have heard that unemployment in Scotland has fallen by 5,000 from September to November and the labour market statistics show that employment in Scotland increased by 18,000 over the three months to November.

We all welcome those developments, but we all agree that there are still far too many young people facing unemployment in Scotland. One in five 16 to 24-year-olds is now out of work in the UK; that is the demographic that is being hit hardest by a very tough jobs market. Martina Milburn, the chief executive of the Prince's Trust, warned that

"Britain is now perilously close to seeing one million young people struggling to find work".

That is an immensely worrying statistic and it is a challenge to each and every one of us. Our young people are paying the price of the recession and are carrying too much of the burden.

I speak not only as a member of the Scottish Parliament and as a spokesperson on young people but, as many members know, as the mother of two new graduates who are trying to find jobs, so I know first hand from my family how difficult this period is. I also know from first-hand family experience that we have not got it right in terms of joined-up thinking to encourage our young people to go out and take the opportunities that might be available, and that the benefits system discourages young people from building their skills and from taking internships, but instead sends them home to their beds and offers them nothing in the way of business education and everything in the way of discouragement. We should ensure that at every opportunity and at every interface with every system of government,

young people are encouraged to build a work ethic, to get out and build their skills and to do what they do best.

As we have come to expect, Robin Harper spoke eloquently about young people, their potential and creativity. We should be doing all that we can to support them, not grind them down.

On Monday, other Edinburgh MSPs and I heard from the director of finance at the City of Edinburgh Council about how young people are being frozen out of the jobs market in Edinburgh. Banks that traditionally took on Edinburgh school leavers are not recruiting them and more experienced older job applicants, many of whom come from the finance sector, are prepared to take entry-level jobs—school-leaver and university-graduate level jobs. We also heard how important it is that projects, such as the Capital City Partnership, continue to secure Scottish Government support. None of us in this chamber thinks that we are in anything other than difficult times and that there are difficult choices for Government. I hope that the Government, and each and every one of us, will keep young people and young unemployed people at the fronts of our minds as we make decisions over the coming weeks about the budget for this Parliament and Government.

Liberal Democrats are serious about skills and the future of Scotland and its workforce. It is not just about what is in the best interests of young people and what they deserve; it is also about what Scotland needs, given the demographic challenge that we face. I know that that aspiration is shared across the chamber, which is why we will support today's motion that calls for the establishment of a Scottish youth microcredit scheme. We supported the idea back in 2007 when our manifesto set out our aim to be the first country in Europe to introduce microcredit schemes to support business and offer advice and training to people from low-income backgrounds to help lift them out of the cycle of deprivation.

We want to ensure that all children and young people get a fair chance at education, training and employment, but they must be offered the choice that is right for them. I agree very much with Elizabeth Smith that we should not set ourselves some random target of having 50 per cent of people go to university. The target that we should set is to give young people a choice so that they can decide what is best for them in their circumstances—their family life and experience. We must ensure that they have the choice to become entrepreneurs and to start their own businesses. Lots of good work is going on, such as the excellent young enterprise guide project in Edinburgh about which we heard earlier, and the work at Glasgow Caledonian University. We hear

a lot of negativity about unemployment and the lack of employment opportunities, but that does not take away from the fact that a lot of good work is going on.

In the past couple of years, lots of good work has been done in the college sector, on which we have relied absolutely. It has flexibility and a can-do attitude, and it has worked with the partnership action for continuing employment scheme and the Government. Colleges are in our communities, working at local level and picking up on the skills that might be needed locally. It is therefore disappointing that the sector received the amount that it did from the Scottish budget. I say that genuinely without wishing to make any point to the Government other than to say that we will support it in any way we can to see whether we can make the situation more positive for Scottish colleges. They have played, and will play, a big part in our recovery.

Having spoken to constituents, I know that few things are more soul destroying than someone being given a college place and then finding that because of a lack of bursary in the college, they cannot take up the place, or that because of changes in bursaries, they have to make changes, possibly to their child care. We must take seriously that situation. We need to take away as many barriers as possible to people getting skills and training so that they can build the future that they want and deserve—a future that both they and we need. We must work to ensure that, as Scotland comes through recession, our young people are not left behind and that their skills, entrepreneurial spirit, endeavour and creativity build Scotland's future for us. We in this chamber have to work together to do everything that we can right now to give young people the support that they need so that they are able to do just that.

10:59

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome today's debate and firmly believe that any measures that can help businesses to thrive and survive, and which offer our young people opportunities to realise their full potential are worth serious consideration by this chamber.

The SNP Government has a good track record on such matters and although we can always do more, and intend to do so, that record must not be overlooked. Last year, our young people achieved the best higher pass rates ever recorded and 86 per cent of them left school to move on to a positive destination, including apprenticeships, college, employment and, of course, a free university education. Further to that, the small business bonus scheme helped to protect and grow small and medium-sized businesses, thus

keeping more young Scots in work. However, we must do more to ensure that all our school leavers move on to positive destinations. Children from deprived areas, those who have additional support needs and looked-after children continue to be less likely to succeed in life. We must therefore continue to focus on the problem.

As the motion makes clear, the Grameen Bank is not a new idea. The first such scheme was founded in 1976 in Bangladesh by Nobel prize laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus to help to improve lives and reduce poverty in rural villages. It proved to be hugely successful. The possibility of having such a scheme in Scotland, however, is debateable because of the legal question: can someone who is claiming welfare benefits receive a Grameen loan? There is yet to be clarification from the Department of Work and Pensions to explain what flexibility, if any, might be available for Grameen borrowers.

Despite that, the Grameen Bank Trust recently set up a partnership with Glasgow Caledonian University with the aim of extending services in Scotland. On 5 July last year, Professor Pamela Gillies and Professor Muhammad Yunus met John Swinney and the chief executives of Social Investment Scotland and Scottish Financial Enterprise. The meeting was a great success, with the cabinet secretary describing the Grameen Bank as

"a very innovative proposal which has much to offer in terms of tackling social and economic challenges."

Professor Yunus made the valid point that

"If it works in every single country, why can't it work in Glasgow, why can't it work in Scotland?"

There is a comparable organisation to the Grameen Bank that goes some way towards demonstrating how successful such projects can be. The Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust offers finance and support to young people living in Scotland who are aged between 18 and 25, or up to 30 if they are disabled, to help them to set up and run their own business if they are unable to get funding from anyone else. The trust aims to help up to 650 new businesses a year and to provide aftercare and mentoring to more than 1,200 businesses in Scotland. As well as that, the PSYBT offers start-up grants of up to £1,000, low-interest loans of up to £5,000, development loans of up to £25,000 to help grow existing businesses that have already received PSYBT funding, and test-marketing grants of up to £250 to help carry out marketing to show viability. Organisations and projects such as that are vital to our unlocking the entrepreneurial talent that lies dormant in many of our young people, and they contribute hugely not only to the lives of the young people but to wider Scottish society. For proof of that, I recommend that members read the case studies on the

PSYBT website that highlight some of the exceptional small businesses that would never have started up otherwise.

The SNP is committed to unlocking the potential of our young people. Under our Administration, we are seeing more young people than ever move into training, employment and further and higher education, and we must build on our record. There are tough times ahead for the people of Scotland as Westminster cuts hit home. I hope and believe that innovative schemes, such as the PSYBT and the Grameen Bank, in partnership with the Scottish Government, can and will help to cushion the blow from the recession and secure employment for even more of our young people. The powers and resources of an independent Scotland would also help.

11:03

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this morning's debate. Robin Harper has always brought to this chamber complete commitment and a genuine desire to make Scotland a better place. His proposals to improve access to finance for young people who are looking to set up their own businesses, co-operatives or community initiatives are worthy of further consideration.

As David Whitton outlined, in government Labour was at the forefront of promoting the Grameen Bank as part of the UK's international development work. We agree that further exploration of microcredit schemes for young people is to be welcomed and encouraged in Scotland.

Young people are facing challenging times. Communities throughout Scotland are feeling the effects of tough economic times, but that is particularly acute when someone is just starting out in adult life with fewer life and employment skills to fall back on and when guidance and support are needed. Without opportunity, all that can be denied or rejected. Any models or initiatives that provide opportunities or options for young people are worthy of our consideration. We must do all that within the context of some of the more positive work that already happens in Scotland. Our amendment and the minister's highlight some of that work.

We face challenges. In Fife, there has been a worrying 57 per cent rise in long-term youth unemployment. The problem is even more concentrated in Glenrothes, Methil and Leven, which together have the highest number of young people out of work in Fife. We have given a commitment to create a Scottish future jobs fund. More than 250 young people in Fife benefited from the future jobs fund. I met young people based at

Rathbone training centre in Glenrothes who are benefiting hugely from the scheme and are extremely positive about the impact that it is having on their lives and future employability. We must do all that we can to provide such opportunities.

The availability of microcredit offers an alternative option for young people to create new enterprises. However, as Robin Harper's motion recognises, that must be done with support and mentoring. There is still some way for Scotland to go for it to be a truly enterprising culture that is open and attractive to more people from all kinds of communities. It is about instilling confidence and about understanding success, risk and—increasingly—social responsibility and community investment. Those values and attributes will encourage young people into enterprise.

Although Fife has some worrying youth unemployment figures, it is in Fife that I have recently seen some excellent work in raising young people's aspirations and confidence. Last year, Caskieberran primary school in Glenrothes was the only primary school engaging in Young Enterprise Scotland. The school worked with Lomond Homes, and it is to the credit of Alan Seath of Lomond Homes that a strong relationship was created, in which both partners devoted time and energy to the project. Alan Seath—the Alan Sugar of Caskieberran primary—provided mentoring, support and real business insight.

Kenneth Gibson: Who has he fired?

Claire Baker: He hires them; he does not fire them. They are only primary school children.

Last year, the pupils made jewellery. This year, they grew into TEAM—"to entertain and motivate". Caskieberran was the first primary school in Scotland to take part in an exciting enterprise project when it worked on behalf of Tree of Knowledge to organise a corporate event. The event, which took place last Friday at the Balbirnie House hotel in Markinch, was excellent and professionally organised. It was fascinating to talk to the teachers, who described it as being unlike any other event that they have been involved in at the school. They described school projects as being extremely planned and controlled, in contrast to the world of business or corporate event planning, which they had been thrown into with a team of 11-year-olds. The project provided excitement, uncertainty, flexibility and responsiveness in business planning that they could never have provided to the pupils as a school. It was engagement with business that brought them to that experience. I was really impressed with the scale of the challenge that the school took on and in which it succeeded. The teachers talked of the tremendous increase in confidence of the young people. They learned

skills in the project that they might never otherwise have had the opportunity to learn. I am confident that in a few years, some of them will be looking for microcredit.

I highlight another example of sheer entrepreneurial spirit and spark: Fife Youth Radio. I first met its participants a few months ago when I visited their studio on the day that they launched. They put me on the spot and asked me which record I wanted them to play. It is on such occasions that we realise how old we are. Fife Youth Radio is an online radio station. The skills that the young people are learning are significant and transferable. What is so impressive about Fife Youth Radio is the level of responsibility, self-motivation and ownership that it has given the young people who are involved. They have taken part in training that is run by Young Scot and the BBC and they are entering a major partnership deal with O2. Their approach to the project has been entrepreneurial, and their partners have fostered that approach by providing leadership training and mentoring.

The work of Fife Youth Radio shows huge initiative. I want to ensure that the energy, skills and enthusiasm that its participants have gained in the project and that young people have gained in other projects throughout Scotland are given the opportunity to flourish in the social enterprise and/or business sector. We should all work together to explore schemes or initiatives that can help young people to realise what their business dream is and to make it happen.

11:09

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): I rise to speak fairly sure in the knowledge that my main qualification in the eyes of the SNP whips is that I am the second-youngest member of the Parliament, although that probably does not qualify me as young in the eyes of most of Scotland's young people. If Aileen Campbell had been available she would probably have been the first port of call for the party whips. Nonetheless I am happy to contribute to the debate. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure what the kerfuffle was among the Liberal Democrat members. They seem to be rather excited about something.

I echo Jim Mather's point about the impact on young people in times of economic difficulty, which is why it is important to have a debate such as this. The Government has a strong record of support for opportunities for young people. I will return to that, if I have time. The ideas in the motion are in the context of the Grameen Bank. I confess that I was not really aware of its work in detail, although I was aware of its existence. It was only in preparing for the debate that I learned a little bit more about it.

Since its inception in the 1970s, the initiative has loaned more than \$10 billion to more than 8 million borrowers, the vast majority of them being women and people who live in poor rural villages in the developing world.

The word "grameen" can mean rural or village. In the context of the Grameen Bank, it embodies ideas of community and co-operation, and recognises the mutual dependency and mutual benefits that we must all share if we want to succeed and build better societies.

The Grameen Bank model has been successfully adapted to poverty reduction initiatives in 38 countries around the world. It lends small amounts at affordable interest rates for projects that allow individuals and communities to make a living for themselves. It provides an alternative to loan sharks and a source of funding in circumstances in which the more traditional banks refuse to lend. The threat of loan sharks and the lack of support from traditional banks are undoubtedly faced by many households, businesses and—as the motion states—young people in Scotland today.

Scotland has a long and proud tradition of sensible and sustainable lending practices, whether through the network of credit unions around the country—as Mr Whitton's amendment rightly noted—or in the legacy of our savings banks, which are now represented proudly but, sadly, uniquely by the Airdrie Savings Bank, which we have acknowledged in the Parliament in recent months.

Nevertheless, it is well worth exploring how the specific Grameen model can be adapted to Scotland. There is much to look forward to in the work of the Grameen Caledonian creative lab that has been established at Glasgow Caledonian University. Like Robin Harper, I welcome that work. Last year, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth met Professor Yunus and the principal of the university to discuss how the project can be taken forward. I am sure that we will hear more about the Scottish Government's support for the initiative from the minister at the end of the debate. I hope that that gives Green members some comfort that their desire to see Scotland's young people supported in accessible and innovative ways is shared by others.

I turn to some examples of support for young people that have been delivered by the Scottish Government. Responding to the difficult economic times that we are in, in June last year Keith Brown, the then Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning, announced a special package to support young people moving from school into the employment market. It included 800 vocational pathway opportunities for 16 and 17-year-olds; a £1,000 incentive for up to 2,000 employers to offer

modern apprenticeships to young people; 750 graduate placements over the next three years; 1,000 volunteering opportunities; and access to 5,000 all-age modern apprenticeships. In 2009-10, nearly 87 per cent of school leavers went on to positive destinations such as employment or further education.

Liz Smith made the point that higher education may not be the be-all and end-all. School leavers who go to university in Scotland now benefit from the restoration of free higher education by the Scottish Government. Thousands of graduates benefit from that decision, and 20,000 part-time students each academic year are benefiting from a new £500 grant. The Scottish Government has prioritised opportunities for young people that parties in other parts of the United Kingdom seek to deny to future generations.

We should welcome new ideas, such as those that were suggested by Robin Harper. The ability of the Parliament and the Scottish Government to leverage finance and to find new funding for schemes such as microfinance and Grameen Bank projects is limited by the terms of the current devolution settlement. If we really want to raise the vision and aspirations of our young people, perhaps we should start by aspiring to be a Parliament that has the normal powers of the countries that are cited in Robin Harper's motion, not the least of which is Bangladesh, which I recall has been traduced in the past by prominent Scottish unionists. Those normal powers are, of course, the powers of independence.

11:14

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): This has been a relatively consensual debate. That does not reflect the fact that we are getting closer to 5 May, but it does reflect the consensus in the Parliament in relation to the role of organisations such as the Grameen Bank. Members have spoken fulsomely about the quality of life that the bank has brought to people in Bangladesh, the United States and other places where it is located. Like others, I would like to see the continued development of the project in Scotland.

It is clear that many members have a much firmer grasp of the subject than I do. I was a little worried by Elizabeth Smith's speech, because I thought for a moment that she had forgotten that we were not having an education debate, but her points were well made.

A legitimate concern, which Margaret Smith reflected, is about the tendency—it is not quite dictatorial—to push kids up one path at the age of 13 or 14. We have the opportunity to give them at that age at least an informed choice about whether the academic world is for them or whether they are

more inclined to travel down the path of an apprenticeship or something that is more practical and vocational. As Margaret Smith said, politicians tend to make arbitrary statements in this place and other places about what is best.

In this consensual debate, we have not yet touched on one issue that has an impact not just on all our young people but particularly on our young people from deprived communities. As I represent large chunks of Lanarkshire, I am acutely aware of the challenges that are faced by communities in Lanarkshire and across the central belt, some of which are the most deprived and vulnerable.

I will stick with the theme of opportunity. I am convinced that people in such communities lack the opportunity to have hope—to look beyond the horizons of the communities in which they find themselves and to realise that things can and should be better. One mechanism for providing that opportunity, outwith the structured way in which we run education, is volunteering.

If we are to offer opportunities to potential entrepreneurs or mini-Alan Sugars—I do not know whether I like that thought, but there you go; perhaps we could use other role models such as Tom Hunter or Tom Farmer—we need to find a mechanism for showing people that they can look beyond the horizon. I have no doubt that the entrepreneurs whom we all know about did not think, "I'm going to be an entrepreneur." Many of them thought, "I'm going to keep bread on the table," or "I'm going to get myself something to do that brings money into my pocket." The more abstract concept has been retrospectively attached to such people and was not present in their minds.

Volunteering in all its senses has a huge role in widening horizons, raising aspiration and providing opportunity. Margaret Smith touched on the fact that the Governments in Westminster and here need to have a conversation if we are to grow participation in volunteering, because the development of a volunteering spirit and attitude clashes with the strictures of the rules of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Margaret Smith: Will Hugh O'Donnell take an intervention?

Hugh O'Donnell: I always worry about taking an intervention from my colleague Margaret Smith.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Hugh O'Donnell can take a quick intervention, after which he should conclude.

Margaret Smith: One great aspect of volunteering that involves a large time commitment is that it helps to build a work ethic as well as skills. Those qualities are utterly

transferable to people trying to get jobs. If the DWP and others do not understand that, they are not doing their jobs properly.

Hugh O'Donnell: I would not dare to disagree with that or with much else that Margaret Smith says.

When the Scottish Government considers the issues that I and others have talked about, I draw its attention to deeper involvement by Scotland in the European voluntary service, which the European Union provides and supports with funds. That brings an international element to volunteering.

11:19

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): Robin Harper might just be on to something. His motion is positive. He used the word “innovative” to describe the proposal, which it is. It is also highly practical. I like the fact that it is designed to solve a specific, difficult and intractable problem. The motion is specific because it focuses on 16 to 19-year-olds, who have suffered disproportionately in the recession. Anything that could improve the lot of our young people must be explored, as Robin Harper's motion says. It has been good to hear that everybody across the chamber is open-minded about the suggestion and thinks that it is definitely worthy of being taken forward.

Before considering the proposal's strengths and commenting on it, I will say that the Conservatives concur with what Jim Mather and David Whitton said about the PSYBT, which is an excellent organisation. A couple of years ago, I read that Tom Hunter had said that if the PSYBT did not exist, it would have to be invented. That is absolutely right.

One reason why the timing of Robin Harper's proposal is appropriate is that, in the current climate, a gap exists in the market because of the financial crisis. Many banks and other institutions are reluctant to lend and certainly to lend on the criteria on which they used to lend. Even some viable running businesses are finding it difficult to obtain credit, overdrafts and access to the facilities that they need. Those difficulties are magnified for young people who have no track record in business and who might not have access to other funds. A gap exists in the market in general and in particular for the people with whom Robin Harper hopes to connect in his motion.

There is a specific group of people who have no money and no access to capital or savings—all that they have is a terrific idea that could make money, put bread on the table and do far more than that. For such people, the suggestion of a Scottish youth microcredit scheme is strong.

As everybody has said—the motion also makes the point—it would be important to ensure that repayment rates were as high as they have been in other countries and to combine the funding with the suggested mentoring. In many cases, funds alone would be insufficient to ensure that a business thrived and succeeded—they would have to go hand in hand with mentoring.

We have talked about microcredit and small businesses, but it is important that mentors do not teach businesses to think small or in micro terms. Some businesses might end up only ever being small, but some might end up as gems. Duncan Bannatyne, who is a multimillionaire and who of course appears on “Dragons' Den”, started his entrepreneurial career as a young man simply by delivering newspapers to far more houses in his area than had previously received them. That entrepreneurial spirit, which was crafted at a pretty young age, along with a load of other attributes, led to his being a success. It is important that mentors do not think small, even though the initial sums will be small.

My time is practically up. The idea is good and should be explored. With the consensus in the chamber today, I have no doubt that it will be explored.

11:24

David Whitton: I am interested to hear that Duncan Bannatyne started his business by selling newspapers. I had my own newspaper delivery business when I was 18. Perhaps I should have stuck at it—who knows what would have happened?

In his opening speech, Mr Harper said that this was his last Green debate in the chamber. I do not often have the chance to debate with him, so I take the opportunity to pay tribute to his contribution—some would say his colourful contribution—to this place since 1999.

I interviewed Mr Harper at Boroughmuir high school when I worked for a political TV programme. As we stood in the playground trying to get the interview done, it was clear that his pupils regarded him as a kind of Scottish Mr Chips—a description that I hope he will accept in the spirit in which it is given. His on-going interest in the welfare not only of his pupils but all young Scots is a fitting tribute to his work as a parliamentarian—the first Green to be elected to a Parliament in the UK. His choice of topic for debate today is typical of the man.

We can all accept that the success of the Grameen Bank has inspired the world, but we also have to recognise that it has proved difficult to replicate its success. In nations with lower population densities, meeting the operating costs

of retail branches that serve nearby customers has proven considerably more challenging. Let us face it: subsidies from donors and Government are scarce and uncertain. In order to reach large numbers of poor people—or, indeed, the growing number of our unemployed 16 to 19-year-olds—microfinance must pay for itself. That could prove difficult in the current economic climate.

In Scotland, we also have the issue of welfare benefits. Obtaining a loan to start up a business can have all types of ramifications for benefit claims. That area needs to be developed further. In that regard, I have some sympathy with Margaret Smith's intervention on her colleague, Mr O'Donnell.

Community-supported lending is not new. From the pre-war tenement support groups to the credit unions that we see throughout Scotland today, there is a rich history of social enterprise. There are already schemes throughout Scotland that offer loans for small business ventures to young people who are not in education, employment or training. Those schemes also offer supported entrepreneurial mentoring. Perhaps we should concentrate more on growing schemes that are already in existence. We have talked a lot about the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust. Since its inception in 1989, the PSYBT has helped more than 12,000 individuals to start more than 10,000 businesses, of which more than 80 per cent continue to trade after their first year in business and 60 per cent are still trading after three years. This year, the PSYBT launched an innovation fund, which is still in its pilot stage. The fund aims to help 18 to 25-year-olds—I know that that group falls partly outwith the age bracket that Mr Harper is talking about—who have an innovative concept or product to secure funding to take their idea to the next stage.

There are other schemes, such as the Shell LiveWIRE scheme, which is the UK's biggest online community for young entrepreneurs aged 16 to 30 who are starting up or running their own business. The scheme offers new start-ups free online business advice and support, and funding and networking opportunities. Shell LiveWIRE is one of the company's social investment programmes. Since 1982, it has helped more than 600,000 young people in the UK to explore starting their own business. It offers an independent service with no costs or strings attached.

Developing future entrepreneurs through a peer-led support service with user-generated content seems to be the way forward. I firmly support my colleague Claire Baker's view, which we heard earlier, that we should start such support not at secondary but primary school level—Caskieberran primary school in Glenrothes is an example. We

should concentrate not only on young entrepreneurs but teen entrepreneurs or pre-teen entrepreneurs. A good example is the young man from Edinburgh, Fraser Doherty, who has spoken in the Parliament. After being taught to make jam using his Granny's secret recipe at the age of 14, he has built a business that now supplies all the UK's major supermarkets with his SuperJam.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Wind up, please.

David Whitton: I will, Presiding Officer.

Fraser Doherty is the kind of example that we need to look at. Let us concentrate on the talent that we have. Last year, a number of entrepreneurs gave £10 million to the Airdrie Savings Bank. Would it not be great if they were to donate even half as much to get the Harper Grameen Bank started?

11:29

The Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): I am very much aware that Robin Harper has an infectious enthusiasm for young people. I have had the privilege of witnessing him interact with young people in schools in and around Livingston. I am glad to support his motion today. As other speakers have said, he is a very colourful character. The motion is typical of his imagination, his flair and his commitment to young people the length and breadth of Scotland.

Recession hits young people the hardest. Unemployment can do long-term damage to the young; it scars individuals and communities. We must learn the lessons of previous recessions and ensure that never again is a generation of young people written off. That means that we must support young people, recognising that they all have different ambitions and needs, as Margaret Smith and Hugh O'Donnell stated. For some young people, that is about helping them to create and grow their own business. Self-employment is the lifeblood of our economy. It is hugely important in the current economic climate when the jobs simply are not there. In supporting the motion, the Government will explore ways of establishing a Scottish youth microcredit scheme.

As many speakers, including Margaret Smith, Kenny Gibson and David Whitton, acknowledged, the crucial issue in establishing Grameen in the UK is that of resolving problems and interactions with the welfare benefits system. We have to rid the system of any disincentives. We have to recognise that, in supporting young people to transform themselves from a state of dependency to one of independence—a notion that I fully support—transitional funding will be needed. I hope that the Conservatives and Liberal

Democrats will take that forward with their Government in London—the UK Government. In the very near future, along with Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Neil, I will meet Lord Freud to discuss a number of welfare reform issues.

As Jim Mather said in his opening speech, this Government remains committed to tackling youth unemployment. We have the immediate and pressing challenges that are associated with the recession. Youth unemployment in Scotland is currently at 17.9 per cent. Although the figure is lower than that for the United Kingdom, it remains too high. We are talking about the lives and futures of some 70,000 individuals. I accept Claire Baker's point that the rate of young unemployment is much higher in some of our communities.

We remain focused on the more fundamental change that is needed to tackle the unacceptable and endemic problem of youth unemployment. Although there is no silver bullet, collaboration between public, private and voluntary sectors is essential if we are to reach out to more young people who face particular barriers in their life to ensure that they, too, get their fair share of Scotland's economic growth.

I am confident that this Government has a robust and clear plan, the aim of which is to support young people to make more successful transitions to adulthood and the world of work. In essence, this is about our substantial investment in skills: £120 million for new training opportunities, of which £60 million is focused on modern apprenticeships.

Mr Mather described the great work that is being done in schools, whether through the curriculum for excellence or determined to succeed. Unlike Elizabeth Smith, I prefer to think that our cup is half full as opposed to half empty.

Of course, our further education colleges promote entrepreneurship, too. They do that at a fundamental level through their hands-on approach to vocational training. Only last week, I had the privilege of visiting Adam Smith College in Fife to help to launch the education into enterprise scheme. The programme will support 1,000 college students on higher education courses to take up work placements with small and medium-sized businesses and third sector organisations.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister needs to wind up.

Angela Constance: I will conclude, Presiding Officer.

There are many good things that I have not had time to mention, including the retention of the education maintenance allowance and our commitment to free higher education and training.

I have listened with interest to comments on funding for student support. This Government has invested record levels in student support—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I really must press you to close, minister.

Angela Constance: We are always open to suggestions on how to improve the lives of students the length and breadth of Scotland.

11:35

Robin Harper: This has been a good debate. I will try to say a few words about everything that members have said.

I thank Jim Mather for giving us a comprehensive introduction to everything that is happening at present, especially at the Government's behest. However, if we add up the sums that various people have mentioned, we find that we are spending close to £100 million on the issue of young people and employment, so £2 million for a Grameen start-up would not be excessive.

It is important that I make a couple of general points. For me, the excitement of Grameen banking is that it is about not just finance but trust and people working together—it is a social and community thing that will give social capital and social cohesiveness to any area of Scotland in which it is introduced.

I thank David Whitton for his kind remarks; I remember clearly the special day at Boroughmuir to which he referred. However, I resist any suggestion that we are already doing enough things and that we just need to develop them. We cannot do enough. Any new idea must be tested and taken forward along with everything else.

Almost every member who spoke mentioned the importance of harnessing young people's potential, which is critical. It is important to pick up on one or two points about the educational system. I thank Liz Smith for mentioning those halcyon days at Boroughmuir. I was interested to hear her comments on the approaches that are taken to young people in German and Danish education. They go along with the idea of parity of esteem for every child in our schools, which means parity of esteem for career paths.

We should not use an examination system to divide the children in our schools into those who are successful—the fifth and sixth year students who go on to university and gather in a hall for prize givings at which loads of books and little silver cups are given out to everyone—and the so-called fourth-year leavers, whom we should rather see as people who are going into jobs, seizing opportunities and going to colleges. Over the past 15 years, the work that the colleges are doing with

young people has changed out of sight; those young people are now leaving with confidence and skills. We and our secondary education system must acknowledge that that is a good career path. That is the parity of esteem that the curriculum for excellence will deliver.

Last week I was at Broughton high school, so I would like for a moment to mention the effect of the cuts. The educational system must bear a share of the cuts, but the Government must be conscious of the fact that cuts are now biting so deeply into the budgets of some of our secondary schools that they will have difficulty delivering the curriculum for excellence, which is the basis of what we are talking about today—having our children leave schools competent, confident, with empathy and with the ability to assess risks, so that they can lead successful lives. Margaret Smith raised that issue. I greatly appreciated her remarks.

I thank Gavin Brown for his clear analysis of the situation and support for the motion. His remarks reminded me that, as well as mentioning Tom Farmer, I should have mentioned Tom Hunter, because he has made a significant contribution in the area.

Claire Baker spoke about primary education in Fife. I have heard about the event at the Balbirnie House hotel that she mentioned, which is an extremely exciting development. However, although we are doing a lot of wonderful work in our schools and colleges to equip young people to be successful entrepreneurs, there is still a problem. I equate it to the situation of school councils. People are elected to school councils, go through all the processes and learn about democracy, but nothing happens, because they do not have a budget to spend. We must back up what we do. If we are to have young entrepreneurs and if children are to be taught how to be entrepreneurs—

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Mr Harper, I must ask you to close.

Robin Harper: I thank everyone for their agreement. I will vote for all the amendments and my motion. I thank members for a very nice debate.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:40

Roads Maintenance (Salt and Grit)

1. John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how it is managing the supplies of salt and grit. (S3O-12703)

The Minister for Transport and Infrastructure (Keith Brown): Through the Scottish salt group, Transport Scotland is monitoring the level of supplies across Scotland and providing support to local roads authorities from the strategic salt stock. The Scottish Government does not formally manage the supply of salt. It is for individual authorities to determine the supply that is needed to maintain their roads.

John Lamont: Although the recent severe weather has eased in recent days, Scottish Borders Council remains concerned that it may not receive the grit and salt that it has on order to see it through the rest of the winter. Can the minister confirm that the Scottish Government will do what it can to ensure that Scottish Borders Council receives those supplies and that there will be no intervention by the Scottish Government to ration supplies?

Keith Brown: As I have already pointed out, it is not for the Government to determine supplies between councils and those from whom they order salt, but I can confirm that, as requested by Scottish Borders Council over the winter period so far, the Scottish Government has made 3,000 tonnes of salt available to the council, which has enough resilience to cover at least seven days. We were happy to help out; that is what the Scottish salt group was formed to do. The action has helped Scottish Borders Council. The request was made and it was met in full. I think that most of the delivery—around 100 lorry loads of salt—has been made to the council. We were happy to do that. It is worth mentioning that we have more salt in stock or on order now than we have used so far this winter, which means that we are in a better position than many authorities in other countries.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): It is all very well having the salt and grit, but if there is no machinery to spread it around it is not much use. Recently, at a meeting in Glen Shee, I discovered that Aberdeenshire Council's new machine to clear roads in the area broke down more or less when the starting button was pushed;

the gearbox was described as finishing up in a million pieces. I was told that the only replacement gearbox was in Germany and had to be shipped in, with considerable delay. I am not arguing that everything should be the same, but does the minister agree that there should be some standardisation in the equipment that is used across the country? As a matter of resilience, will he look at what local authorities buy and use?

Keith Brown: It must be pointed out that it is for local authorities to make their own orders. Nigel Don is correct to say that increased resilience can be achieved if we work closely with councils. The discussions that we have following the current severe winter will indicate whether standardisation is the correct route to take. Presiding Officer, you will not be surprised to hear that I am no expert on gearboxes for gritters, but the Scottish Government has made the offer—which Aberdeenshire Council has taken up in some circumstances—to help the council when trunk road gritters are not being used for trunk roads. We will be happy to do that in future.

Devolved Taxes and Charges (Forecasts)

2. Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how frequently the forecast income from devolved taxes and charges is monitored and how accurate published forecasts have been. (S3O-12695)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government regularly monitors forecast income from business rates and council tax and from charges that it sets, such as prescription charges. Every effort is made to ensure that any published forecasts are as accurate as possible, based on the data that are available when the forecast is made.

Derek Brownlee: It was illuminating to find out that monitoring takes place “regularly”, without any further explanation of how frequent that might be. Would it not help the Government’s case for having access to greater fiscal powers if it were rather more transparent about the powers that it already has? Would it not be more useful to all of us if we had access to rather more frequent updates of forecast revenues? Can the cabinet secretary confirm the current position on the expected yield from non-domestic rates income for 2010-11, compared with the figure that was predicted in the draft budget?

John Swinney: I am surprised that Mr Brownlee believes that there is a requirement for more transparency—this Administration is very transparent with all the information that we have available to us. We regularly publish extensive financial information, which I know Mr Brownlee looks at carefully.

Every year, we publish an estimate of the non-domestic rates income that has been collected. Clearly, at different stages of the year, depending on the thousands of payments that individual companies make, it is difficult to provide a reliable estimate—and one that could not be misinterpreted. I fear to say to Mr Brownlee that information of this type can sometimes be misinterpreted and misconstrued by the forces of darkness—and we would not want that ever to happen with any such information.

Chief Medical Officer (Annual Report 2009)

3. Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to the annual report of the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland 2009, in particular regarding the promotion of a salutogenic asset-based approach to future health creation. (S3O-12692)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): We are taking a range of actions to respond to the chief medical officer’s 2009 report, from action plans on tuberculosis and hepatitis C to the development of drug and alcohol partnerships.

With regard to promoting assets-based approaches to health creation, we are taking a number of actions with a range of partners, including through the eight equally well test sites, through support for the formation of an assets alliance, and by contributing to a European Union project on health assets.

Sandra White: I thank the cabinet secretary for that comprehensive response. The chief medical officer’s report cites many examples of the roles of healthy living centres in empowering communities and promoting health and wellbeing. Is the cabinet secretary aware of the difficulties that some HLCs are experiencing with funding, particularly in Partick, in relation to the work of the area’s community health and care partnership? Would it be possible for the cabinet secretary to contact Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board and Glasgow City Council regarding the issue? Can the cabinet secretary inform us exactly what powers and support can be given to HLCs in the future?

Nicola Sturgeon: The member will be aware that the Scottish Government, in recognition of the important role that healthy living centres can play, provided more than £3 million of support for those centres by way of transition funding between 2008 and 2010. That was explicitly in recognition of the challenges that they faced moving from Big Lottery funding to sustainability.

We have always adhered to the principle that, in the longer term, funding decisions about healthy

living centres properly lie with local agencies. We have encouraged local agencies to work closely with healthy living centres and to discuss their longer-term sustainability.

In relation to Partick in particular, the member will be interested to know two things. First, of the £3 million that I have mentioned, Partick received £130,000 in transitional funding. Secondly, I understand that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has recently confirmed that it is supporting the Partick centre financially up to the end of this financial year. That follows a meeting between the health board and the healthy living centre yesterday. A further meeting between the board and the centre is due to be held on 1 February to discuss options for 2011-12. That is positive news, and I know that Sandra White will wish to be kept updated on further progress.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (Support)

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 4 is from Linda Fabiani.

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am sorry—there has been a mistake, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You are down to ask question 4.

Linda Fabiani: Oh—I think it is the second time today that I have had to apologise to you, Presiding Officer. I must be coming down with something.

The Presiding Officer: So question 4 is withdrawn, I think. I will therefore call question 5, from Peter Peacock.

Linda Fabiani: No—I do have the question.

The Presiding Officer: Right—Linda Fabiani, then.

4. Linda Fabiani: I will start all over again.

To ask the Scottish Government how it supports small and medium-sized enterprises. (S3O-12674)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government recognises the vital contribution that small and medium-sized enterprises make to our economy. We are firmly committed to maintaining a supportive business environment and to ensuring that appropriate measures are in place both to stimulate start-ups and to grow existing SMEs.

We have introduced a range of policies that will improve the business environment for SMEs, such as the small business bonus scheme, which reduces rates for tens of thousands of businesses; the transfer of business gateway to local authorities; investment in broadband; reducing unnecessary burdens on business; and making it

easier for SMEs to access public sector contracts. We recently announced £6.6 million from the European structural funds programme to provide advice and support to small businesses and entrepreneurs and to help create more than 7,000 jobs.

Linda Fabiani: I thank the minister for that very detailed answer. I acknowledge that the latest official statistics show that the number of businesses in Scotland has risen during the first three years of a Scottish National Party Government. Does the minister agree with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Federation of Small Businesses that the proposed supermarket levy is an appropriate measure—especially given supermarket profits—to help rebalance the relationship between out-of-town shopping centres and town-centre locations?

Jim Mather: We can add to those organisations the Scottish Grocers Federation and the Scottish Licensed Trade Association. This is an opportunity for the supermarkets to align with the people of Scotland—their customers, who are suffering uncertainty in the jobs market, whose incomes are frozen and whose pensions are down, with VAT on fuel and other difficulties also to consider.

There is a growing opinion in this regard from business schools and thinkers, who are discussing the idea of businesses moving towards a concept of shared value, whereby they seek to reward not just their shareholders but their customers, their employees, their suppliers, their communities and, in the long term, the taxpayer. That redefinition of profit would allow the businesses that we are discussing to move forward and to do even better in the future.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab): Does Mr Mather recall John Swinney's written answer to me of 7 October 2010, in which he confirmed that 129,773 small businesses qualified for the small business bonus in 2009-10, as compared with only 114,620 that are eligible today? How does he explain that to the 15,000 small businesses that no longer qualify for rates relief, following rates revaluation?

Jim Mather: I always look to Labour to find the glass half full. Scotland is moving forward, and the support from the FSB has been absolutely fulsome. We will continue to move forward in conjunction with all the businesses of Scotland.

UK Consumer Protection Bodies (Reform)

5. Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking and what progress is being made in examining the United Kingdom Government's proposals for the reform of UK consumer protection bodies; what devolved implications

there are for Scotland and its consumers, and when it will report its findings on the proposals. (S3O-12661)

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): Those are reserved matters, as the member will know. Although the UK Government proposals will have implications for Scotland, the policy detail is not yet fully defined. We invited key Scottish stakeholders to form a working group to consider how we might optimise future arrangements in Scotland and influence decisions in Whitehall. I expect the group's report in February.

Peter Peacock: I am grateful to the minister with regard to that plan, and I am grateful for the work that he indicates is being done. I understand that the UK Government is entirely open to there being an outcome in Scotland that is different from that for the rest of the UK. I urge the minister to make early proposals to the UK Government to influence its forthcoming consultation on the future of Consumer Focus Scotland and to work with other parties across the Parliament to try to secure a consensus on the various options and build on the common ground that I believe will exist between members on the issue.

Jim Mather: That was a constructive contribution from the member, and my answer is yes to all of that. I reinforce the message that we are maintaining close contact with the UK Government. We view this as an opportunity to create a model that provides a best solution for Scotland. The more voices that are involved in that, the better.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Will the minister take up with his UK counterparts the need for manufacturers to publish details of known faults with their products and for consumer organisations to take into account the variety of ways in which customers now choose to complain about products and services, notably via internet postings?

Jim Mather: We are entering a new era, following the financial services crash, in which people are looking to manufacturers and all businesses to be much more aligned with customers and their wellbeing. I will make a point of doing as the member asks.

The Presiding Officer: Question 6 is from Joe FitzPatrick.

It appears that Mr FitzPatrick is not in the chamber, which I think is very regrettable. I will therefore call question 7, from Ken Macintosh.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Change Fund)

7. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions are being held with carers and carers organisations to ensure their involvement in the planning and delivery of the change fund in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area. (S3O-12652)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Guidance to local health, housing and social care partnerships on accessing the reshaping care change fund was issued on 23 December. The guidance asks all partnerships, including those in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area, to submit local change plans to the Scottish Government by 28 February. It sets a clear expectation on partnerships to include carers and carers organisations, as well as other third and independent sector partners, in preparing and agreeing their change plans.

Ken Macintosh: I am sure that the minister is aware of the anxiety among carers and carers organisations about the cuts that are proposed for local government. She will also be aware of the difference that access to the change fund would make to organisations and centres such as the one that is run by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers in East Renfrewshire.

It is essential that carers and carers organisations are involved in the reshaping of older people's services, not just at operational level but at strategic level. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that such organisations are involved every step of the way, including in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government has provided more funding for carers during the past four years than was provided previously. I hope that the member acknowledges that. We have provided support in a number of ways. For example, much of the carers information strategy money has gone directly to support local carers centres and carers organisations. That direct support to carers has been much appreciated by carers organisations.

I regularly meet carers organisations at national level and I made it clear to local partnerships that I wanted carers to be around the table at an early stage, while plans on the change fund were being drawn up. Carers organisations welcomed that, and I expect local partnerships to go forward on that basis.

COSLA (Meetings)

8. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities leadership. (S3O-12654)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I last met COSLA's leadership last week.

Duncan McNeil: I hope that when the cabinet secretary met COSLA last week he was able to make the strongest representation with regard to the agreement between the Scottish Government, COSLA and Scottish Enterprise on the funding of urban regeneration companies. The agreement should be honoured.

The collapse of the agreement has resulted in Riverside Inverclyde, my local URC, facing a 70 per cent cut, which threatens Inverclyde's future economic prosperity. Will the cabinet secretary intervene to ensure that Inverclyde, which he has accepted is less resilient than other areas to the current public spending cuts, receives its due share of funding? Will he ensure that Riverside Inverclyde is allowed to continue its valuable regeneration work in my constituency?

John Swinney: I quite understand the issue that Mr McNeil raises. He does not need me to remind him that there are challenges in the public finances. There has been joint working between Scottish Enterprise and local government on all those questions and I am sure that discussions will continue. I assure Mr McNeil that the work of URCs is substantially supported by Government and contributes to the regeneration of many communities in our country.

Supporters Direct (Meetings)

9. Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it last met Supporters Direct. (S3O-12634)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Shona Robison): My officials last met Supporters Direct Scotland on 2 July 2010.

Bill Butler: The minister will be aware that a recent poll for Supporters Direct showed an overwhelming groundswell of support among fans for bigger, not smaller, leagues and for supporter representation in Scottish Football Association structures, both of which aspirations chime with the recommendations of the McLeish review. Given the debate on league reconstruction that is raging in Scottish football, can the minister inform the Parliament and football fans throughout Scotland of the Scottish Government's position on those important matters?

Shona Robison: I very much value the role that Supporters Direct Scotland has played during the past three years. I also very much support an enhanced role for supporters in football clubs.

On the proposals for league reconstruction, what is important is that the clubs come to a position that they can agree on, to take Scottish

football forward. I am not sure whether the intervention of politicians in such matters would add anything to the debate.

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-2838)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have been speaking to Jorge Calvet, the chairman of Gamesa, which is the world's third-largest manufacturer of wind turbines. In half an hour's time, Señor Calvet will announce that Gamesa intends to establish a research and development centre in Glasgow, creating 130 jobs. Furthermore, he will announce that the company will sign memoranda of understanding with Scottish Enterprise, Forth Ports and Dundee City Council for its intention to establish a manufacturing, organisation and maintenance base in Dundee. I know that the whole Parliament will welcome that benefit to the Scottish economy.

Iain Gray: The Scottish Government was caught red handed this week doctoring evidence on Scotland's economic future. It took from an academic paper the quotation that I have here but changed the words so that it means something else. Will the First Minister tell the Parliament who doctored that evidence and on whose authority it was done?

The First Minister: If Iain Gray is going to hold pieces of paper up, he should get bigger writing so that people can see what they say.

That was Iain Gray's first question since last September that could be related to the Scottish economy. Basically, it boiled down to his objection to the insertion of a square bracket explaining what fiscal devolution means—that is,

"[the proportion of revenue and expenditure devolved]".

When I studied punctuation and parenthesis, I was told that a square bracket was where one put a point of explanation. However, if Iain Gray's objection to getting real economic powers for the Parliament and for Scotland boils down to his objection—following Wendy Alexander's lead—to a square bracket, the Labour Party has finally come to the end of its role.

Iain Gray: No. When I studied English at school, if one took a quotation and changed the words in it, it was not a quotation any more. The First Minister cannot just dismiss the point. The Scottish Government used that doctored evidence in its draft budget and published it in its policy paper on financing Scotland. It was the centrepiece of Alex Salmond's speech to his Scottish National Party conference, but it is simply

not true. Will he now admit that it is simply not true?

The First Minister: The quotation is from Professor Andy Hughes Hallett and Professor Drew Scott and, of course, they stand by their analysis that fiscal devolution means

"the impact of devolving both spending and tax powers".

If the authors of the quotation agree with the Scottish Government that that is an acceptable description of what fiscal devolution means—I repeat for Iain Gray's information that it means Scotland having power over its spending and its ability to raise revenue—why on earth is Iain Gray objecting to it?

The substance of the argument is as follows: the Scotland Bill Committee, which is dominated by the unionist parties, refused to examine the Scotland Bill's tax proposals because it knows that there is a deflationary bias that would cost Scotland either £8 billion, according to the Scottish Government, or £700 million, according to the Scotland Office.

The unionist Scotland Office and the independence-seeking Scottish Government agree that the proposals in the bill, if applied over the past 10 years, would have cost Scotland many hundreds of millions, if not billions, of pounds of revenue. The only disagreement is by how much Scotland would have been disadvantaged, so how on earth can a committee justify not examining something that it is meant to scrutinise and which could be of great damage to the Scottish economy? When we should all be seeking to benefit employment in Scotland, how can Iain Gray come along and ask me about a square bracket?

Iain Gray: The committee examined the evidence, and it was found wanting. The First Minister told us this week that, as a boy soprano, he had a range of four octaves. I was impressed—Pavarotti could manage only two and a half, although I believe that Julie Andrews has four octaves, too. However, that is nothing compared to how far the First Minister will stretch the truth to try to make his case for independence. The First Minister told the SNP conference:

"We know thanks to the work of Andrew Hughes Hallett and Drew Scott that with economic powers we could grow the Scottish economy ... 1 per cent a year."

However, the professors did not say that and they still do not say that. It is not true. Did the First Minister misspeak, or did he mislead his own party?

The First Minister: I am sure that the whole Parliament is mystified by Iain Gray, as we are week on week, but I suppose that the great mystery is why someone with his magnetic

personality has yet to be invited on to “Desert Island Discs”. I have been thinking and wondering what Iain Gray’s selection would be if he ever got invited on to that programme. How about “London Calling” by The Clash or “That’ll Be the Day” by Buddy Holly? I point out to Iain Gray that, if Professor Hughes Hallett and Professor Scott are correct and we get a 1.3 per cent increase in gross domestic product, that means that we have a 1.3 percent increase in Scottish overall wealth every year, after getting economic and financial powers.

It is fascinating that Iain Gray seems to believe that the committee has been examining the Scotland Bill, when that is about the only subject that Wendy Alexander refuses to talk about. Time after time, Professors Scott and Hughes Hallett said, “Can we comment on our evidence?” but Wendy Alexander, the convener of the committee, did not want to talk about it. Why not? Because it has a deflationary bias that will cost every person in Scotland money. That is why the Labour Party does not want to talk about proposed legislation that it intends to support. In contrast, economic powers will bring Scotland wealth and prosperity.

Iain Gray: Frankly, the longer the First Minister spends on a desert island, the better for Scotland. Leadership is a question of character, trust and judgment. If you take a piece of disputed research and then doctor it to mean something else, and you then embellish it and multiply the figures to suit your argument, how can you be trusted? If you then base your vision of Scotland’s future on that edifice of nonsense, what does that say about your judgment? And when you are caught out, if you will not put your hands up and admit it, what does that say about your character? Will the First Minister now republish his budget and take that doctored evidence out?

The First Minister: Let us deal with three points. First, Professors Hughes Hallett and Scott, the authors of the analysis, said in *The Scotsman* on 19 January 2011 that their figures

“were based on the impact of devolving both spending and tax powers.”

That is fiscal devolution, fiscal autonomy, fiscal responsibility or independence over the economy as we understand it. Secondly, the argument that some members in the Labour-Tory alliance on the Scotland Bill Committee have made—I recognise one of them, David McLetchie, sitting over there—was that Professor Feld did not argue about the devolving of both revenue and expenditure. The trouble is that David McLetchie and the committee cited only a part of the quote from Professor Feld’s evidence. I have the full quote before me. It goes on to say, and I quote, without square brackets:

“Decentralisation of taxes and spending leads to a more efficient public sector and it enhances economic performance.”

Enhancing economic performance is increasing economic growth and increasing economic growth is increasing prosperity for the Scottish people. If we can increase economic growth, as Professor Hughes Hallett and Drew Scott argue, we increase wealth and prosperity and employment in Scotland. If we are led by the unionist parties into the Tory trap of reduced Scottish spending that will result from the deflationary bias in the Scotland Bill proposals, we will face 10 to 15 years of progressive cutbacks in Scotland. That is why, when it comes to making a decision, people will vote for growth and real powers for this Parliament and this country.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

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

To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S3F-2839)

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

Annabel Goldie: A quarter of a million people in Scotland are employed in the retail sector. That is one in nine of the Scottish workforce. Many shops are also vital outlets for Scottish food. The First Minister knows that because, when Sainsbury’s announced 1,300 new jobs in Scotland, he described it as—this is not a doctored quote—

“a significant boost to the economy.”

Now, however, many shops the length and breadth of Scotland face the Salmond super-tax, which threatens jobs and investment. How many jobs will be lost? Why is he giving out the message that in Scotland, if you grow your business, create more jobs and are a success, the Scottish National Party will punish you with a Salmond super-tax?

The First Minister: When we face difficult, tight economic conditions and when Annabel Goldie’s party’s Government at Westminster has introduced a £1,300 million cutback in our ability to spend, it is entirely reasonable for us to look for efficient ways to raise revenue so that we can protect public services and invest in things that we believe are vital for job creation.

As Annabel Goldie knows—we discussed the matter as recently as last week—we put forward a proposal for the small business bonus scheme. That was opposed by the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, but we managed to get it through, and we have retained and expanded the small business bonus scheme through the session. The scheme cost £140 million. It benefits 80,000 small businesses in Scotland, which pay no business rates or ones that are heavily reduced, and it is a vital engine of job creation and growth.

I say to Annabel Goldie that if we want to maintain the small business bonus scheme and to protect public services, it is entirely reasonable to ask those with the broadest shoulders to pay their fair share of tax.

Annabel Goldie: I want to help all businesses, which is why my party made possible the provision of help with business rates bills to small businesses. The £30 million that the First Minister says might be raised by his proposal could be found four times over by dealing with the high levels of absenteeism in the public sector.

When it comes to his super-tax, the First Minister is sending out a message that it just does not pay to be a business success in Scotland. Whatever happened to the legendary SNP prawn cocktail offensive on business? Now the SNP is just being offensive to business. Never have so many prawns died in vain.

If the First Minister really cares about Scottish business and Scottish jobs and really wants to secure the Scottish recovery, he should put the kibosh on his tax on jobs. Will he scrap his Salmond super-tax and will he do that now?

The First Minister: Annabel Goldie quotes Michael Heseltine. Instead, I will quote Colin Borland of the Federation of Small Businesses, who said:

“three quarters of our members feel that it’s time for the largest out of town supermarkets—who benefit from free parking and other amenities that our members don’t enjoy—to start paying their fair share”.

I will also quote Stephen Boyd of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, who said:

“Let’s hope that the Parliament will pass this measure and quickly move on to discussing those aspects of economic development that really can make a difference to Scotland’s workers”.

The Scottish Licensed Trade Association said:

“The Scottish Government has identified a fair and reasonable way to raise money in this very difficult economic climate.”

I do not claim that the Conservatives are inconsistent. On every possible occasion and at every possible opportunity, they will back big business, but we have put forward a proposal that we believe is fair. It is right for the economic times that we are in, when we must raise additional revenue, and it will help to rebalance the burden on business between the high street and the out-of-town supermarkets. If it was not going to raise £30 million, there would not be the degree of opposition from the big retailers that we have seen. It is designed to raise money to protect public services, to finance the small business bonus, and to help to finance the council tax freeze. If Annabel Goldie and the Conservative Party want to delete it, they will have to specify

what issues beyond their vague commitments they are going to raise, tell us how they are going to raise the money, and tell small business and the people of this country why they, instead of those who have the broadest shoulders, should have to pay.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

3. Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S3F-2840)

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

Tavish Scott: Next week, the Parliament will debate the budget. I accept that choices will have to be made to allow any new spending. A year ago, I asked the First Minister about high pay in the public sector. What progress has his Government made since then?

The First Minister: We have made substantial progress. We have announced proposals to introduce severe wage restraint in the public sector because we believe that that is part of the contract to maintain employment, but we will protect those who are on the lowest incomes in the public sector. That is the right way to proceed, and it is part of the Government’s social contract with our employees and those of the national health service and other agencies, and with the people of Scotland.

Tavish Scott: A year ago, the First Minister told me that high pay had already been dealt with. We asked the same 160 public sector organisations how much they are spending to pay staff more than £100,000 per year. They told us that last year they spent £281 million and this year they are spending £334 million, so spending on high pay has gone up by £53 million in one year. I am puzzled because, although the SNP Government’s pay policy promised punitive action on high pay, spending is rising quickly. Does the First Minister still believe, as he has just said, that those who have the broadest shoulders should carry the biggest burden?

The First Minister: Yes, I do. That is why we propose a pay freeze for those who are earning more than £21,000 a year in the public sector.

The basis of the Government’s approach has been to substantially reduce administrative expenditure in the public sector. The member has seen the budget proposals that do that dramatically. The basis of the Government’s approach is also to heavily restrict bonuses in the public sector, hence our argument in relation to consultants in the health service. We have led the field on that issue against an unwilling Westminster Government and against the

extremely slow progress of the present Westminster Government. Anyone who looks at John Swinney's record as finance secretary can see that he has proposed that those who have the broadest shoulders should bear the biggest burden. He has done that with the intention of protecting employment in the public sector. Our dearest wish is that, if we can get the flexibilities that will be required and acceptance of the pay settlement, our policy of no compulsory redundancies can be maintained. That is something of which the Government is very proud indeed.

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): I will take a supplementary question from Frank McAveety.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I welcome the First Minister's comments about jobs, economic growth and fairness. Does he think that it is right and fair to slash the budgets of urban regeneration companies across Scotland? Will he ask his enterprise minister to intervene to prevent the 46 per cent cut in the budget that is available to Clyde Gateway in the east end of Glasgow, which will jeopardise the opportunity to bring jobs and industries to a number of vacant sites in one of our most economically disadvantaged communities? When did the east end of Glasgow become the area with the broadest shoulders in Scotland?

The First Minister: As Frank McAveety should well know, the budget for Clyde Gateway is £18.1 million for 2011-12. That is a substantial commitment that will allow Clyde Gateway to deliver the priority projects that it has established for 2011-12.

As Frank McAveety also knows, and as has been generally acknowledged, we are incredibly supportive of the Commonwealth games project. It will be a fantastic development for Glasgow and a fantastic adventure for Scotland as a whole. The overwhelming majority of the people of Glasgow appreciate that commitment from the people of Scotland and the Scottish Government. I am sure that those same constituents would want their representatives occasionally to reflect that endorsement of a substantial investment of hundreds of millions of pounds in Glasgow.

Paternity Leave

4. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the expected economic impact in Scotland would be of the United Kingdom Government's proposal to allow fathers to take up to 10 months' paternity leave. (S3F-2856)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): There would be an economic impact, but we welcome the UK Government's proposals on enabling

fathers to share the care of their children. Scotland is leading the way on addressing inequalities between men and women and on improving support for families, especially during the early years of a child's life, when it can make such a key difference.

Ian McKee: I thank the First Minister for his answer and share his welcome for the proposed arrangements, which will allow fathers to bond more closely with their children in the important early years of life. Does he agree that any possible short-term increased cost or loss of productivity caused by the policy would be more than offset by the improved social and educational consequences of allowing both parents to play an active part in their child's upbringing?

The First Minister: The estimates for economic impact were based on a 4.8 per cent take-up and suggested that 1 per cent of small businesses would be affected on that basis. The estimates were produced by the previous Westminster Government and are shared by the current Westminster Government.

I accept Ian McKee's point that there is substantial evidence on the importance of parental support and attachment in child development and wellbeing. We know, too, that the impact of parental neglect on a child can be extremely damaging and permanent. Supporting parents is therefore one of the cornerstones of the early years framework, and I agree that maximising positive paternal time with young children will pay dividends in the future. I think that there is political unanimity that that substantial enhancement and investment in the future makes the measure worth supporting.

Renewable Energy (China)

5. Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what contribution the Scottish Government made to securing the recent renewable energy deal with China involving Shanghai Huanan Boiler & Vessel/Cochran and W2E Engineering Ltd. (S3F-2853)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Neither the Chinese Government nor the Scottish Government was directly involved in the commercial agreement, but Scottish Development International provided its normal investment support.

Elaine Murray: Is the First Minister in a position to advise us what the deal means for the two companies' subsidiaries in Dumfriesshire? Cochran Ltd last week appeared to be unaware of the deal and has submitted a petition to Dumfries sheriff court to request that Waste2Energy Engineering Ltd be wound up, claiming that a bill worth several thousands of pounds owed in

connection with the Scotgen Dumfries plant has not been paid. The First Minister was keen to claim some publicity around the deal at the beginning of last week. In connection with that publicity, can he assure us that the deal means jobs in the Annan area and money coming into Dumfriesshire?

The First Minister: I am aware that there has been some confusion locally about the extent of the involvement of Cochran Ltd in the agreement. The origin of the confusion is the use of the SHBV brand name in China, where it is SHBV Cochran. Cochran Ltd itself is not a signatory to the agreement, although it is a potential beneficiary of the deal—a fact confirmed by SHBV in a press statement on 13 January, which I will be happy to send to the member.

I say to Elaine Murray that Chinese direct investment in Scotland is undoubtedly a good thing. There are companies in Scotland that would not be trading at the moment without that investment. The agreements that were announced at the beginning of last week will be of immense benefit to many workers in Scotland, not least at the Grangemouth refinery, and to many industries in Scotland, not least the whisky and salmon industries. Countries in surplus, such as China, must be encouraged to invest directly in our economy. That developing relationship should carry the support of every single member of this Parliament.

Fish Discards

6. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to eliminate the discarding of fish. (S3F-2846)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): John Scott is right to raise the issue. Across Europe, fishermen are forced to discard—and have been for generations—perfectly good fish back into the sea, although they are dead. That is a waste of a perfectly good and healthy food and a vital economic resource.

As John Scott knows, the Scottish Government has been working with fishermen and other stakeholders, and we are leading the way in efforts to reduce the discarding of fish. This year, our innovative catch quota system was the largest in Europe, and it is one of a number of measures that we are taking to reduce discards.

Reducing discards will continue to be a priority for the Government, along with returning full powers over fisheries back to Scotland. I know that many members support our action against discards, just as many members across the chamber are vehemently critical of the common fisheries policy.

John Scott: Most right-thinking people are outraged by discarding—indeed, none more so than the fishermen who are fighting for their livelihoods. Some 41 boats have been tied up this year, yet they are forced to implement this dreadful practice.

The First Minister will be aware of fishermen's unease with the catch quota approach that his Government has taken, but he will also be aware that the United Kingdom Government has called for an end to discarding coupled with more decentralised decision making, which will be vital to achieving that. In the light of that, will the Scottish Government redouble its efforts to work with UK ministers, European officials and, crucially, Scotland's fishermen to develop other ways of reducing discards, in addition to catch quotas, and so end discarding for good?

The First Minister: If we are to end discarding, it will require fishermen to be allowed to land what they catch. The catch quota system is designed to enhance quota to allow that to take place. The catch quota system is extremely popular and has been oversubscribed several times, with many applications for places in the scheme. It is vital that the enhancement of quota is sufficient to allow the catch quota system to operate fully.

I am sure that John Scott will acknowledge—I looked it up when I saw his question—that I made my first speech about discarding in a debate on a motion in the House of Commons in December 1988. It has been a long-term campaign by me and just about every other fishing MP to see the obscenity of discarding removed from fisheries policy. I hope that he will agree that the catch quota system must be allowed the opportunity to provide part of the answer.

Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my view that the only way for the Scottish Government to have a real voice when it comes to the common fisheries policy and the progression of innovative policies on discards and maintaining healthy fish stocks is for Scotland to become a full independent member of the European Union?

The First Minister: Yes, I do. There are two aspects of the common fisheries policy that I will never be able to understand. We have been discussing one of them: discarding is an obscenity and it should be removed. The other is that, under the common fisheries policy, landlocked member states—many of which, no doubt, Iain Gray has insulted from time to time—have more say in deciding fisheries policy than the nation of Scotland, which has a vast proportion of the territorial waters in the European Union. That is why only an independent Scotland will have a seat at the top table and be able to defend the rights of our fishing and rural communities.

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Although I share the First Minister's concerns about the extent of discards and indeed his criticisms of the common fisheries policy, he will be aware of the criticisms that were levelled at the catch quota approach this week. Bertie Armstrong, the leader of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, described the approach as a perfect control measure for enforcing a system of management that is broken. In that context, what would the First Minister say to those Scottish white-fish skippers who have already registered with producer organisations south of the border and those who are contemplating doing so as a result of concerns about the approach that is being taken to catch quotas and, indeed, conservation credits?

The First Minister: I say two things to Liam McArthur. First, it is clear that the catch quota system is extremely popular, as applications to the system have been substantially oversubscribed. He should not give the impression that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is against the principle of catch quotas, because it has made it clear on many occasions that it is not. The concern is whether the enhanced quota will allow the catch quota system to operate properly. That is exactly what Richard Lochhead and his officials are dealing with at present.

I remember that the member's leader once had to resign from a Government over the common fisheries policy. Although I share the concerns about it, if people are critical of the common fisheries policy, as Liam McArthur and I have been, they must consider two things. First, they must put forward proposals to mitigate the impact that the CFP has had and keeps on having on our fishing communities. The catch quota system, which will enhance the quota that is available to Scotland as well as to individual fishermen, is an attempt to do that.

Secondly, it is not a policy just to criticise the common fisheries policy; there must be an alternative—a different style and system of managing this resource. That is why I have always believed that national management of resources is perfectly compatible with European policy. That is what we should seek as a Parliament if we are to take best advantage of our position as one of the countries with the most plentiful fishing in the whole European continent.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I normally refer to fish with a twist of lemon and a shake of black pepper, but, if I am allowed to intervene in this debate, I suggest that there is an alternative to the suggestion that Maureen Watt made. If Alex Salmond has been trying since 1988 to make sense of the common fisheries policy, does he not draw from that some sort of lesson that maybe we

should just get out of the European Union altogether?

The First Minister: I do not draw that conclusion. I would rather just change the common fisheries policy and allow us control of our own resources on fish and other things. However, I do agree with Margo MacDonald that the common fisheries policy is rather like the Schleswig-Holstein question in European history: only three people ever understood it—one is mad, one is dead and I have forgotten.

12:31

Meeting suspended until 14:15.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Rural Affairs and the Environment

Marine Special Areas of Conservation

1. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what infraction proceedings are associated with failure to meet European Commission policies regarding the designation of marine special areas of conservation. (S3O-12670)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): Failure to comply with the habitats directive requirement to designate special areas of conservation can result in the European Commission commencing infraction proceedings. That can lead to a European Court of Justice ruling for failing to comply with the obligations. Not complying with such a ruling can result in a significant fine.

Alasdair Allan: Is the minister aware of my opposition to the proposed marine special area of conservation designation in east Mingulay? What representations will the Scottish Government make to the European Commission about the inadequacy of the consultation process around such designations for which European Union law provides?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am more than aware of the member's concerns about the designations. We are under a legal obligation to designate special areas of conservation, and that designation must be based on the scientific evidence alone. There is little prospect of a change in EU law on the matter. Nevertheless, we are committed to working with local stakeholders to minimise any impacts of designation, should it go ahead. It is at that point, when one is working out the management measures, that socioeconomic factors can be brought into play. I am conscious of the fact that the announcement of the designation of special areas of conservation such as the one that the member mentions creates a great deal of concern, especially in rural peripheral communities.

"Low Carbon Scotland: Public Engagement Strategy" (Timetable)

2. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish a timetable for the implementation of the actions for

2011 laid out in its publication, *Low Carbon Scotland: Public Engagement Strategy*. (S3O-12662)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): Those actions will be carried out throughout the year, many of them as a continuous process and others via specific events. A number are already under way. The delivery plan will be subject to annual evaluation and updating.

Cathy Peattie: I felt that the public engagement strategy was an important provision of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009; therefore, I was disappointed that the strategy was launched just before the bells. The voluntary sector and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland say that the strategy is very poor and that the Government is failing Scotland. How does the Government expect to reach the ambitious targets that were laid down in the 2009 act unless it wins the hearts and minds of the public, the private sector and the communities in Scotland? Is this yet another delaying tactic?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member expresses her concern but then quotes other people. I would be interested to know whether the member has actually read the public engagement strategy. The strategy is extremely important, as it is something on which we will base our delivery plans as we work through the process. I look forward to a dynamic discussion about how we can engage the public; I am very concerned about that, because some messages seem to get over more easily than others. It would be helpful if members with bright ideas were to communicate them to us instead of carping on the sidelines.

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): When we think of the public in terms of public engagement strategies, we usually think of individuals and families, but I presume that it also includes senior business figures and large organisations. How much work will the public engagement process undertake with the business community and how much support does it already have in that group?

Roseanna Cunningham: The strategy contains strong links with the private sector, which will be vital in helping us to achieve our targets both through its direct actions and through its adaptations. It is extremely important that we keep the private sector on board. Engagement with the business community is a key part of wider public engagement. It is important because that community will be critical in developing and promoting Scotland's transition to a low-carbon economy—as will every single one of us.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): The minister might think about engaging with the public in my constituency and agreeing

with the thousands of my constituents who oppose the proposed pyrolysis incinerator in Coatbridge, because such incinerators can undermine efforts to reduce carbon emissions by discouraging recycling and other more innovative green solutions.

Roseanna Cunningham: I hope that Elaine Smith will communicate further with me with regard to the specific issue that she has raised. Engagement with the public means that we will often have to deal with issues that might, on the surface, appear contradictory but from which we cannot run away. The issue that the member mentions might be one of those issues. I look forward to Elaine Smith contacting me directly on her specific concerns.

Salmon Farming

3. Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it considers that a successful farmed salmon industry is an important part of the economy. (S3O-12690)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): Yes. Salmon aquaculture is a success story for Scotland and continues to play a key role in our economic recovery, providing high-quality and secure jobs in many rural and coastal communities in Scotland's Highlands and Islands.

The farmed salmon industry in Scotland was estimated to have a farm-gate value of £412 million in 2009—a 23 per cent increase on the previous year. It also produced about 144,000 tonnes—that figure is up 12 per cent on the previous year. That is a huge success story, in any language.

Maureen Watt: The minister is aware of the comments apparently made recently by the United Kingdom Government's minister with responsibility for fisheries, Richard Benyon, attacking the farmed salmon industry. Does the minister believe that such comments are deeply unhelpful and does she agree that Mr Benyon should publicly retract his criticism of the industry, especially since there is now huge potential in the Chinese market?

Roseanna Cunningham: It would be fair to say that we were disappointed with Richard Benyon's comments, particularly because they were based on some factual mistakes. As we know, the reputation of farmed Scottish salmon is that it is a high-quality healthy product, and that the industry is fully regulated. I suspect that Mr Benyon's comments were born of a lesser understanding of the issues of aquaculture than we might be accustomed to in Scotland, given that it is an extremely small part of the English economic make-up.

We need to address the issue. I am writing to Richard Benyon to remind him of the importance of the salmon industry in Scotland, and I understand that the Scottish farmed salmon industry intends to invite him to visit Scottish farms and see them for himself.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Highlands' share of the Scottish salmon farming industry is some £58 million, in terms of rural employment. What is the minister doing to encourage other forms of fish farming in Scotland?

Roseanna Cunningham: Aquaculture, in the broadest sense, includes far more than simply farmed salmon. We have a healthy and growing shellfish sector, which is important with regard to the areas that Jamie McGrigor is talking about. There are also interesting moves in terms of halibut, which have been successful in the areas in which they have been undertaken. We are keen that the industry should grow into other areas. However, there is no doubt that farmed salmon is by far the largest component of aquaculture in Scotland, which is why it gets such a great amount of publicity.

Sewage Treatment Works (Bothwell Road)

4. Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what action it can take to ensure the elimination of the noxious odours that emit from the sewage treatment works at Bothwell Road in Hamilton. (S3O-12650)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): Scottish Water advises me that it has not received any complaints about odours at the sewage treatment works at Bothwell Road in Hamilton and that no odour nuisance was present when the waste water treatment team leader visited earlier this week. I have asked Scottish Water to contact Mr McCabe directly to discuss the situation in more detail and to arrange any further investigations. I understand that that might already have happened.

Tom McCabe: I appreciate the minister's offer, and I will take it up. We have already arranged a telephone conference.

The odour is an intermittent problem that depends on weather conditions, but it generates a fair degree of concern among residents.

Roseanna Cunningham: I fully appreciate the difficulty—I experienced the same difficulty with a particular area in my constituency and I suspect that similar issues are known to other members. I am pursuing the history of complaints in respect of the matter.

Scottish Water has through its programmes made improvements to the waste water treatment works at Hamilton. Between 2006 and 2010, it invested about £580,000 in the plant and it expects, between 2010 and 2015, to invest a further £3.3 million, so there might still be hope for the member in that.

Local Food Producers (Large Retailers)

5. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in encouraging large food retailers to offer outlets in their stores to local food producers. (S3O-12671)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government engages on an on-going basis with retailers on a host of issues relating to Scotland's food and drink supply chain through the Scottish grocery retailers forum. Retailers have also signed up to the retailers charter, which commits them to working in partnership with Scotland's food and drink industry. That is reaping dividends, with major retailers stocking many more Scottish products in their stores and working closely with local suppliers. In fact, this evening, Asda will launch its supplier development programme, which involves Asda working with 10 local suppliers to better understand the supply chain and grow their businesses.

Willie Coffey: Is the minister satisfied that adequate arrangements are in place to help consumers identify Scottish and more locally produced produce? If not, will she work with the retail sector to ensure that the locality labelling arrangements for Scottish produce are improved, not just in large retailers, but online and in local food stores?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member will know that the Scottish Government has actively pursued the issue. It is part of what we have tried to do through the national food and drink policy. It is important for niche suppliers to get the kind of designation that the member talks about, but that is not always as easy as it might seem on paper and a lot of work has to be done.

A lot of work has already been done. We work closely with the retail industry through the retail forum and the retail charter, and with the wider food industry, to ensure that appropriate information is provided for consumers to help them identify the origin of products. We will continue with that engagement, because I suppose that it is one of those issues on which we will never have a full stop and be able to say that it is sorted.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The minister will be aware that progress has been slow in local authorities, prisons and other institutions on the

uptake of the use of local food and the initiative that Andy Kerr, the then health minister, launched in 2004. What further progress has been made on the issue, given the obvious benefits to child health and towards meeting climate change targets?

Roseanna Cunningham: There continue to be procurement issues, of which the member will be well aware. We continue to pursue that aspect because, from the perspective of the food and drink industry and the consumer, it is of great benefit if the big institutional providers can use local produce wherever possible. However, as the member knows, that is not as easy as simply saying it, and we must continue to work hard to try to achieve it.

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): In response to John Scott, the minister mentioned procurement issues, but East Ayrshire Council and other councils have been exemplars in their sourcing of local food. East Lothian Council sources 100 per cent of its food from the local area. The food budget for local authorities alone is about £58 million per year. Through lodging freedom of information requests, I have found that local authorities spend only 3.5 per cent of their food budget on sourcing food locally. Does the minister agree that we should not hide behind European Union procurement rules, as that is not a real issue, given that it has been addressed by local authorities in Scotland and by countries in the EU such as Italy?

Roseanna Cunningham: It is a little unfair to talk about hiding behind procurement rules. Every local authority will be considering the issue. Those local authorities that provide exemplars ought to be lauded, and I do not want not to do that. East Ayrshire Council and East Lothian Council—which I have visited, so I know about the work that it has been doing—must be congratulated and the rest of the local authorities in Scotland need to follow their good example. Pressure can be brought to bear on local authorities from many different angles, not just from the top down; pressure from the bottom up is very important, too.

Waste and Recycling (Cold Weather)

6. Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive what advice it has issued to residents whose household waste and recycling was not collected and whose recycling centres were overflowing during the recent cold weather conditions. (S3O-12717)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): The situation was different from local authority to local authority but, in general, those local authorities most affected by the severe weather conditions focused on dealing with the backlog of residual

waste collections and advised householders to store recyclate or to take it to recycling centres when it was practical and safe to do so. The Scottish Government issued similar advice through a press release on 27 December.

In a number of cases, local authorities put in place contingency arrangements and set up temporary collection points. In all cases, local authorities worked very hard to cope with the unprecedented conditions that they faced and have caught up with the backlogs that were created over December.

Nicol Stephen: Is the minister aware that some residents had to wait many weeks for their normal household waste collection and that some recycling centres, including the one in my constituency at Asda's Bridge of Dee store in Aberdeen, which I witnessed for myself, were so overflowing with uncollected waste that they clearly represented a health hazard?

What action will ministers take to learn important lessons from the serious problems of this winter; to better co-ordinate the activities of councils, especially when machinery and vehicles break down; and to provide additional emergency resources and support whenever that is necessary to ensure that those serious problems are not repeated?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am sure that the member will bring forward proposals during the budget process to identify the money that he thinks is required to support such arrangements and to indicate where it will come from.

The fact is that local authorities are responsible for dealing with the issues in their areas and, in my view, they have done their best in extremely difficult circumstances. Some authorities' collection crews worked over weekends, while some authorities relaxed the rules on households presenting excess bags of rubbish and provided large skips into which householders could place waste.

In general, as the member well knows, it is not the function of the Scottish Government to oversee the work of local authorities, but there are mechanisms for addressing local authority performance. I hope that if the member is making complaints, he has, in the first instance, made them through his local authority's complaints procedure.

Public Bodies (Reform) Bill (Forestry)

7. George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultation it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the provisions for forestry in the Public Bodies (Reform) Bill. (S3O-12639)

The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change (Roseanna Cunningham): I have discussed in correspondence with forestry ministers in England and Wales the provisions for forestry in the Public Bodies (Reform) Bill at Westminster, and I will continue to monitor the passage of the bill to ensure that the interests of Scottish forestry are protected.

George Foulkes: I congratulate the Scottish Government and the minister, in particular, on joining us in resisting the privatisation of Scottish forests, but will she confirm that if, despite our opposition, the Tory-Liberal Democrat bill is pushed through at Westminster and English forests are privatised, that will threaten jobs at the UK headquarters of the Forestry Commission in Corstorphine in Edinburgh? I thank her for what she has already done on the issue and ask her if she will now join us in cross-party action to protect those jobs.

Roseanna Cunningham: I am in constant discussion with forestry officials in Scotland, as the member will no doubt be aware. It is the case that the English proposals—I say "English" because that is what they must be—would have an impact on UK forestry as a whole simply as a result of the fact that jobs would be likely to be threatened. It is a matter of some regret to us that the biggest threat hangs over jobs in Scotland—those in Corstorphine—as the member said.

In my view, however, the initial enthusiasm of the UK minister, Jim Paice, seems to be becoming somewhat moderated as he realises just how difficult a process he has set in motion, and how hard it will be to do what he thinks he wants to do. As yet, I suspect, he has just begun to touch on the likely backlash that there will be when the general public in England begin to realise what he is up to.

Justice and Law Officers

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Question 1 is from Brian Adam. Question 2 is from Karen Gillon. It is a gross discourtesy that neither member is in the chamber. I will move on to question 3 from James Kelly.

I see that Mr Adam has joined us. Mr Adam, I am afraid that you are too late.

Custodial Sentences

3. James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment has been made of the impact on public safety of the implementation of a presumption against custodial sentences of three months or less. (S3O-12645)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Judicial discretion will remain and when a court considers that no other method of dealing with an offender is appropriate because, for example, there is an unacceptable risk to public safety, it will be able to impose a short prison sentence. As they do now, courts will continue to take public safety concerns into account when they decide what sentence it would be appropriate to impose in any particular case.

James Kelly: Yesterday, the Parliament debated the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 and the Government supported the general principles of the bill. I agreed with that. During the debate Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Community Safety, said:

“Domestic abuse is abhorrent, repellent and a stain on Scotland.”—[*Official Report*, 19 January 2011; c 32306.]

I agreed with him. Why, then, is the SNP Government going ahead with a policy that will, on current figures, result in more than 50 per cent of those who are currently imprisoned for domestic abuse being released into the community and bringing fear and intimidation to their victims?

Kenny MacAskill: It will not. The reason for judicial discretion is that the Government was lobbied by those who work in domestic violence and by, for example, Sheriff Susan Raeburn of the domestic abuse court in Glasgow. They made it quite clear that they saw merit in the short sentence because it provides respite for the victims of domestic violence and their families. We were persuaded by that, which is why it remains a matter for the court's discretion. If Sheriff Raeburn or any of her colleagues, in Glasgow or elsewhere, wish to impose a short sentence to provide respite, they will have the full support of this Administration.

We have to break the cycle of reoffending, which is why it is a great tragedy that Mr Kelly failed to note Ed Miliband's debut speech as leader of the Labour Party in September 2010, when he said:

“when Ken Clarke says we need to look at short sentences in prison because of high re-offending rates, I'm not going to say he's soft on crime.”

What a pity that the Labour Party north of the border still has its ears closed.

Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): Ignoring Labour's scare stories for a moment, I am delighted that the cabinet secretary has confirmed that sheriffs will still be able to hand down a custodial sentence of three months or less if necessary. However, does he agree that people who are convicted of violent offences and are deemed to be a danger to the public should not be receiving short custodial sentences in the first place?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. That is a fundamental point and it is a great tragedy that rather than the Labour Party looking at what Ed Miliband is trying to do south of the border and giving us a coherent penal policy, we get scare stories that are meant to inflame the situation. When someone needs to be sent to prison for a short prison sentence, whether because of domestic abuse or something else, the court will have our full support.

Mr Maxwell's point is equally well made. Those who perpetrate serious violent offences in Scotland should not be getting short prison sentences or community disposals; they should be locked up to protect our communities.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Could the cabinet secretary share with us the Government research that prompted it to introduce the policy initially? Leaving aside the issues that Mr Kelly has raised, the majority of the cases in which short periods of imprisonment were imposed were like those of the three-time disqualified and drunken driver, the shoplifter with 40 previous convictions, the domestic abuser, and people who were a nuisance to their community. Jail sentences are not handed out indiscriminately. Does the cabinet secretary think that he knows better than the sheriffs?

Kenny MacAskill: Not at all. I cannot provide the evidence at the moment—it is not in front of me—but anecdotally I can share with Mr Aitken the discussions that I had with the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Ken Clarke. He was telling me about when he was Home Secretary in a Tory Government in the distant past and how, since then, prison numbers have continued to rocket. He persuaded me that the level of crime and anxiety in England have not rocketed to the same extent, and he thought that something was manifestly wrong.

That is why the Conservative Government, supported by its Lib Dem partners, is seeking to head in the same direction as this Government, which direction is, as Mr Maxwell pointed out, that prison should be for those who commit serious offences and are dangerous and violent in our communities while those who are feckless, handless or whatever else should be dealt with by tough community sentences. In these times when financial probity is needed, we are sick and tired of having salt added to the wounds by paying substantially to give people free bed and board when they should be paying back through the sweat of their brow for the damage that they have done.

Police and Fire Services (Angus)

4. Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has for future

provision of police and fire services in Angus. (S3O-12691)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): In my statement on 12 January, I set out the Government's ambitions for improving the performance, local accountability and financial sustainability of Scotland's police and fire and rescue services.

We are looking at how to structure our police and fire and rescue services effectively to protect the front-line delivery that is essential to communities in Angus and across the whole of Scotland. Our consideration of the options is not simply about addressing the significant financial challenges each service faces. It is also about providing appropriate accountability and enhancement of service. We will shortly start a consultation that will allow everyone to put forward their views. Although we are minded towards single services, no decisions will be made until all the evidence, including the consultation responses, has been fully considered.

Andrew Welsh: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer and welcome the news that major reform of our outdated police and fire service structure is to take place. Even if we were not facing unprecedented financial cuts from Westminster, there would still be a strong case for reducing the number of police and fire boards. Given the financial pressures that Westminster is imposing on us, can the cabinet secretary tell us how long it would be before maintaining the status quo started to affect the level of service that people could expect?

Kenny MacAskill: That is a valid point. We are clear that the status quo is already untenable and the financial strictures are beginning to hit—we see that in news coming from around the country. That is why we have to change, whether it is in the fire and rescue service or in the police.

We accept as a Government that change is not cost free and that significant elements of detail require to be fleshed out, but the point that Mr Welsh correctly made is that, although one of the reasons for—indeed, perhaps the genesis of—the proposals for change is the overarching financial position, we should not forget that the current structure was introduced arbitrarily in 1975. Everybody acknowledges that, if we were starting with a blank sheet of paper, we would not configure such services in Scotland in the current way, with one half being represented by one force. We have to look at accountability and structures, and we have to ensure that the level of service provision in urban areas is available elsewhere, even in peripheral rural areas.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, whatever

the future structure of our police service—and particularly if there is to be a single force—it will still be vital for people in Angus in my region and elsewhere that there is local accountability for decisions on police priorities? Given the importance of the issue, will he state prior to the election, as we have done, whether he supports a single police force?

Kenny MacAskill: I am entering into a consultation and I have set a direction of travel for the Government. I know that the Labour Party has made its final decision without trying to square the detail.

We have always made it clear that the quality of policing in Scotland, which is unsurpassed and excellent, has come about because we have policing by consent. It is clear that there is some dissension and dispute, both in the ranks and in our communities, about what the best structure is. As a Government, we are convinced that the current structures are untenable and that we require to go forward, whether that is to a single service or a regional model.

We want to reach consensus. On that basis, we are having a consultation and we will seek to work with people to square the circle and to meet the doubts and scepticism. We hope that, ultimately, we will come to a decision that unites the people of Scotland. I will leave it to the Labour Party simply to dictate a position.

Scottish Court Service (Weapons)

5. Andy Kerr (East Kilbride) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how many knives and other weapons have been seized by the Scottish Court Service since 2007. (S3O-12646)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The term “weapon” has been taken to mean any form of knife—the most prevalent being lock knives, penknives, kitchen knives and Stanley knives—along with scissors, loose blades for Stanley knives, open razors, razor blades and knitting needles. The number of weapons seized by the Scottish Court Service was 311 in 2007, 1,518 in 2008, 1,937 in 2009 and 2,030 last year.

It is likely that the rise in confiscation figures can be attributed to improved security in courts, improved recording and reporting activity, greater awareness among staff, and more frequent sharing of security intelligence between justice partners. The discovery by staff of any weapon or potential weapon is immediately reported to the police, who have a presence and responsibility for public order in all our court buildings, and successful prosecutions have resulted from the Scottish Court Service's security arrangements.

Andy Kerr: I welcome the initiatives that have been taken to ensure that weapons are

confiscated and people are brought to justice as a result. However, we know that, in Aberdeen and Dundee sheriff courts, hundreds of people have had so little regard for the minister's soft-touch approach to the justice system that they have been prepared to bring weapons to the court and gain entry. Although we welcome the measures to resolve the matter in terms of detection, that behaviour shows a complete lack of respect for the Government's approach. Will the minister finally see that his approach is not working and that it is time to join the tens of thousands of other Scots who want to see Labour's plans for a minimum mandatory sentence for knife carriers brought into law?

Kenny MacAskill: I practised in the criminal courts in Scotland for 20 years and, during that period, which ended almost 12 years ago, security measures such as metal detectors were introduced. I think that they came in at a time when a Labour Government was in power. The problem is not new. It has been with us for some considerable time. However, it is clear that the actions that the Scottish Government is taking are working. A record police presence, whether in our communities or in our courts, is resulting in people feeling safer and more secure. We have the lowest recorded crime in 32 years and we have also seen a significant drop in violent crime, which is down to its lowest level since 1984.

Progress is being made. We do recognise the cultural problem. It is just a great pity that Labour north of the border fails to recognise the opportunity that exists south of the border to work towards a consensus to make our communities safer.

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): What would have been the impact on the seizure of knives and other weapons if mandatory sentencing, as proposed by some parties, had been introduced? How would that have affected communities such as Inverclyde, where there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of knife-related incidents since the no knives, better lives initiative was established?

Kenny MacAskill: As I said, it is clear that significant progress has been made. The member is correct to point out that significant and substantial progress has been made in his own area of Inverclyde, which has been one of the most blighted areas. Wherever members sit in the chamber, they should recognise that progress.

We should also remember that the proposals for a six-month mandatory sentence are significantly less than the powers that are already possessed by a sheriff sitting in a sheriff court in Greenock or elsewhere. It beats me why on earth we would want to have a sheriff impose a lower sentence when somebody with evil intent is apprehended,

detained and ultimately prosecuted for possessing a knife. The fact of the matter is that progress is being made and we should welcome the actions of the police, prosecution and indeed those who sit in the judiciary in Inverclyde and elsewhere.

Short Prison Sentences

6. Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has had with the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Justice regarding the value of short prison sentences. (S3O-12685)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): As I briefly mentioned in response to Mr Aitken, I met the Secretary of State for Justice on 14 September last year and we discussed a range of issues including the importance of community sentencing. Since then—indeed, last month—the secretary of state published a green paper on reoffending, much of which I think we can welcome. The UK Government is setting out to reduce the use of short prison sentences, make increased use of community sentences and make such sentences more effective in terms of reducing reoffending. Legislation passed by this Parliament to move in the same direction is of course already on the statute book and will, I am glad to say, come into force on 1 February.

Ian McKee: As well as noting the opposition of that wise elder statesman, Kenneth Clarke, to the routine imposition of short prison sentences, does the cabinet secretary not also agree with another elder statesman of Mr Clarke's party, namely Edward Leigh, MP for Gainsborough, who when chairman of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee drew attention to the fact that the reoffending rate for prisoners with sentences of less than 12 months was extremely high, with 60 per cent being convicted of another offence within a year of release? He therefore considered that short sentences "served little purpose". Would the cabinet secretary welcome it if members of Mr Clarke's and Mr Leigh's party listened to their colleagues' wisdom and supported the Government in this matter?

Kenny MacAskill: I would absolutely welcome that. I was not aware of that particular quotation, but I very much welcome it. Indeed, it follows on from the comments made by Kenneth Clarke to which I have already referred. I have no doubt that Mr Leigh's statement will also be welcomed by Ed Miliband, even though it will fall on deaf ears up here.

Not only is this approach being taken north and south of the border; the Government and the major opposition parties in the Republic of Ireland are heading in the same direction. With the Conservative Government and the Labour leader

down south, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, consensus is growing. I have no doubt that some day and some time sooner rather than later the Tory and Labour coalition that exists in Scotland will come forward.

John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)

(Con): I am sure that, like me, the cabinet secretary has met constituents whose communities have been blighted by individuals causing severe disruption and engaging in antisocial behaviour. Very often, those constituents have sought the help of the police, the antisocial behaviour unit and local housing providers without any success and it is not until cases get to court and the offenders in question are sent to prison, albeit for a very short time, that the constituents in those communities get any respite from that behaviour. What will the cabinet secretary tell his own constituents now that he has taken away the possibility of respite?

Kenny MacAskill: We have not taken that away. That is the whole purpose of retaining judicial discretion in such matters. I do not know what relationship the member has with Scottish Borders Council, but I point out that my constituency covers areas such as Craigmillar and Lochend, which have their fair share of trouble—more, perhaps, than some of the areas that he represents—and in my experience the community safety team at council level and the policing at police station level have been outstanding. There are, of course, difficulties and challenges to face and there are certain people who neither work for nor want to and who cause great difficulties. However, that is why we have and seek to use antisocial behaviour orders and why those who are beyond such measures and face criminal charges are finding that they are going to prison—and for longer.

Domestic Abuse Courts

7. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to roll out the domestic abuse court to other parts of Scotland. (S3O-12643)

The Minister for Community Safety (Fergus Ewing): The domestic abuse court was established in Glasgow because of specific circumstances, primarily the volume and seriousness of cases being reported, and the lessons learned from that court have been used to develop a domestic abuse toolkit that is designed to help local sheriffdoms to decide how best to arrange domestic abuse cases in their area and recognises that approaches may vary depending on the number and pattern of cases being reported at local level. It will be for local justice partners to decide how to apply the toolkit in each sheriffdom.

Rhoda Grant: I thank the minister for his reply and, indeed, welcome the toolkit. He will be aware that the advocacy provided at the domestic abuse court in Glasgow has been hailed as a great success in its provision of support and information to domestic abuse victims. Will he roll out that facility to other courts to ensure that victims in other areas of Scotland do not face a postcode lottery?

Fergus Ewing: I recognise the member's interest in this area; indeed, we are working with her to improve the law for all victims of domestic abuse. As she knows, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service takes such matters very seriously all around Scotland and, as a case in point, the service provides specialist domestic abuse training for all legal staff. That is extremely important and the combination of victim support and effective court proceedings is helping to reduce repeat victimisation.

Through the Minister for Housing and Communities, we have made members aware that the Scottish Government will continue to provide support and assistance during 2011-12, and it is appropriate that all local criminal justice partners not only consider how best to support victims of domestic abuse in their area, but learn the lessons from the work that has been successfully carried out in Glasgow.

Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7710, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

14:56

The Minister for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Before I open the debate, I signify that there is Crown consent to the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. For the purposes of rule 9.11 of the standing orders, I advise members that Her Majesty, having been informed of the purport of the bill, has consented to place her prerogative and interests, so far as they are affected by the bill, at the disposal of the Parliament for the purposes of the bill.

It gives me great pleasure to present my bill to members for stage 3 scrutiny, and I am very happy to propose that the Parliament should pass it. I thank members of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, the Finance Committee and the Subordinate Legislation Committee for their hard work and careful scrutiny of a very technical bill; MSPs for their comments on it during its passage through the Parliament; and the organisations and individuals who provided oral and written evidence to the committee and briefings for MSPs on the bill's provisions. The bill deals with complicated technical issues, and I am sure that all members acknowledge the helpful comments and advice that were received from the organisations that contributed to the parliamentary process.

The bill addresses specific gaps and weaknesses in the current heritage legislation framework. Those gaps and weaknesses were identified during extensive discussions with stakeholders in 2007 and in 2009, when a draft bill was subject to a full public consultation. The bill will, for example, harmonise aspects of ancient monuments and listed buildings legislation and historic environment legislation with the planning regime. It will also improve the enforcement toolkit and the ability of regulatory authorities to work with developers.

The bill is the result of a genuine consensual approach to legislation. I take the opportunity to highlight the key role that stakeholders played in helping to shape the bill and refine its provisions as the process progressed through the pre-consultation, consultation and parliamentary phases, and thank the individuals and organisations that contributed to the various

working groups and seminars that were set up by Historic Scotland. Those working groups and seminars helped to shape the bill that is before us today. The engagement process that has accompanied consideration of the bill, which the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities described as

“a model of stakeholder engagement”,

has contributed to the bill's relatively smooth passage through the Parliament. That is reflected in the level of support and good will that the bill has attracted from all parties since it was introduced on 4 May 2010.

I want to touch on some ways in which the parliamentary process has helped further to refine and improve the bill and elucidate its policy context. When we debated the bill's general principles at stage 1, I gave a commitment to write to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee and MSP colleagues to provide them with further explanatory material about certain provisions in the bill. That was done, and I hope that the committee and MSP colleagues found the information helpful and informative. In my correspondence, I commented on the process associated with issuing retrospective scheduled monument consent; provided practical information on the types of monument that the bill is specifically designed to bring within designation; touched on the certificates of immunity process; and provided details about the operation of scheduled monument enforcement notices and stop notices. I can confirm that the material that I sent to the committee on those issues will inform a revision of the Scottish historic environment policy and Historic Scotland's operational guidance.

The stage 1 report recommended that the Government should consider the issue, which some stakeholders raised, that expertise must be available to interpret information on the historic environment. I wrote to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee on 7 December and noted its comments in relation to the modification of the defences in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 by section 3 of the bill. In my response, I confirmed that those provisions relate solely to scheduled monuments and invited the committee to note that Historic Scotland, acting on behalf of Scottish ministers, deals with all matters affecting scheduled monuments, including the designation and associated consents processes. I also confirmed that Historic Scotland is the main source of advice and expertise on those matters.

At stage 2, I lodged a number of minor technical amendments that clarified a few of the provisions, and I thank the committee for its support. I also thank the Subordinate Legislation Committee for its useful and careful scrutiny, which led me to

consider some of the changes that were made. I think that I reflected at the time that it was important that we acknowledged the work of the Subordinate Legislation Committee, and, indeed, I moved amendments following its recommendations. The bill has clearly benefited from parliamentary scrutiny, so I thank those who contributed to the process.

In setting the policy framework for the bill, the Scottish Government directed that it should be drafted with the intention of avoiding placing significant new burdens or duties on private bodies or individuals, and that, in the current financial climate, the implementation costs should be kept low. I am happy to note that those overarching policy aims have been met.

Finally, although this is a very technical amending bill, I believe that it will enhance the ability of Scottish ministers and planning authorities to manage sustainably Scotland's rich historic environment by providing authorities with a much-improved legislative toolkit to help protect and enhance our historic environment for the benefit of future generations.

As we reflected in the stage 1 debate, members have a great deal of passion for and interest in Scotland's built heritage. I hope that that can be reflected in some members' speeches, but it is important, in carrying out our legislative duties, to ensure that the enjoyment of our built heritage for years to come is supported by legislation that is fit for purpose and that we progress all our responsibilities effectively. I think that the bill will do that, so I commend it to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill be passed.

15:02

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I lead for Labour in the debate as a substitute for my colleague Pauline McNeill, who unfortunately is ill and sends her apologies. I also apologise, because I cannot stay for the whole debate, as I previously arranged another engagement. I apologise to the Presiding Officer and to other members.

I am interested in the topic, as a former planning minister, former chair of the 1999 festival of architecture and design, and as the founder, I suppose, of the architecture and the built environment cross-party group in the Parliament. The bill addresses some issues that are familiar to me.

In the 1999 festival, we focused not only on modern architecture and design but on Glasgow's unrivalled architectural history. It was described by

John Betjeman as the outstanding mid-to-late-Victorian city, with huge diversity and richness of architectural heritage. Of course, during the period that the great buildings in Glasgow were built, we had a fantastic flourishing of architecture and design excellence, epitomised by the work of Alexander Thomson and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. When we look up in Glasgow, above the shopfronts, and see the fantastic range of design and the variety of invention, it takes the breath away at times. Probably the only city that compares with it—there is a close parallel with when it was built—is Chicago. There are interesting links between Glasgow architecture and Chicago architecture of the period roughly between 1870 and 1910.

One of the centrepieces of the year was the transformation of the derelict former Herald building in Mitchell Lane into an architecture and design centre for Glasgow—the Lighthouse. That is one of many Charles Rennie Mackintosh buildings that have been very well preserved in Glasgow through the activities of Glasgow City Council and the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society. A considerable amount of work has also been done by Glasgow City Council and Historic Scotland to preserve other buildings in Glasgow, particularly the Egyptian halls by Alexander “Greek” Thomson, the church at Caledonian Road and some of the domestic buildings that Thomson and other architects created.

We were hindered in the process of protecting those buildings by certain circumstances, such as who owned the buildings and the insecurity of providing grants and ensuring that they were used for the correct purposes. One difference that the bill will make is that it will give much greater security to the Scottish Government and organisations such as Glasgow City Council in intervening, awarding grants and ensuring that the money is used appropriately, because it will be possible to charge owners if the money is misused.

In Glasgow, one problem is that owners can take over historic buildings and fail to maintain them and then, when they reach the point of falling down, it all becomes inevitable. Earlier intervention and the use of grants will help the process. Had the bill been in force 10 or 15 years ago, it would have been easier to deal with a number of issues that arose in Glasgow—I am sure that similar issues have arisen elsewhere in Scotland—where, despite the best intentions of the official agencies, they were unable to act as effectively as they would have liked to protect buildings. It will be particularly helpful that when public money is handed over in the form of grants, it will be possible to reclaim it if it is not used correctly.

The bill will systematise the collection and maintenance of inventories and other information about designated landscapes and historic battlefields. In Scotland, we probably have more than our fair share of battlefields—perhaps that reflects our orientation as a people and the nature of our history. I think that everyone agrees that it is important that those landscapes and battlefields are properly identified and protected. We should learn from the excellent work that is done in the United States, where civil war battlefields are well protected as historic sites and information about what happened on them has led to the development of a flourishing tourism industry in areas where the civil war was fought. That has been good not only for the economy, but for people's knowledge of their history.

Since the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 was enacted, a process of making Scottish statutory instruments to give effect to various aspects of its framework has been followed. I suppose that the bill could be seen as part of the process of drawing out the implications of the 2006 act and applying them in a particular context—in this case, the historic environment.

I am pleased that the importance of the historic environment, as well as the significance of historic buildings, in Scotland has been acknowledged. I am keen on Scottish history and the maintenance of our historic environment, and often the best way to explain it to people is to allow them to see what is left of it for themselves. If we can protect our historic environment and explain it better to people who live here and come here, we will have done something worth while.

I commend the bill, which I believe has the consensual support of all members.

15:08

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Members might recall that at stage 1 I described this as

“a much ado about nothing bill.”—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2010; c 30071.]

The fact that no amendments have been lodged indicates that my judgment might not have been far off. However, since it is the mark of any civilised society that it preserves and safeguards its historic heritage, we on this side of the chamber will today support the bill, despite its limited scope. That does not mean that we do not have reservations.

We should continue to be alert to the concerns expressed by the Law Society of Scotland about section 18, which allows “any person” to apply to Scottish ministers for a certificate of immunity that states that a building will not be listed for five years following the issue of the certificate. As the

Law Society pointed out, section 18 could have unintended consequences, especially as the scope of those who may apply for a certificate of immunity is to be extended to “any person”. Members will know that the section was intended to assist property development, but as worded it could mean developments being frustrated by a hostile party applying for such a certificate.

Fiona Hyslop: I am aware of the Law Society's interest. The same concerns were raised at stage 1 and considered by the committee, which took the view that there was no pressing need to address them. There always is a risk of somebody objecting to listing. A listing exemption could be granted. What kind of frustration would there be if the objector somehow had the listing granted? It would be counterproductive. I appreciate those concerns, but they have been fully exercised and debated in the committee.

Ted Brocklebank: I accept what the minister says, and I know that the committee looked carefully at section 18 and on balance accepted the current wording, but we shall have to see how it works in practice. If the Law Society's fears are realised—as I suspect they will be—we should return to the provision at some future date when, I happen to believe, more substantive heritage legislation will be required.

The committee noted concerns in relation to other sections of the bill, some of which Liz Smith and I raised at stage 1. Those included the proposed inventories for gardens and designed landscapes—and battlefields, of course; the extension of the definition of a monument; and the liability of an owner of a listed building for expenses related to urgent work. I am grateful to Historic Scotland for getting back to me after stage 1 to flesh out its thinking on some of those issues.

As a result of that, and because I believe that a more comprehensive historic environment bill is now inevitable, we on the Conservative side of the chamber chose not to lodge amendments but to highlight heritage matters that we believe still need to be addressed.

I make no apology for returning yet again to three listing anomalies in my own region that the bill will do nothing to resolve and which I have raised directly with Historic Scotland. These problems are not unique to the area that I happen to represent.

The first concerns the plight of a farmer near Crail in Fife, whose plans to develop his own land have been stymied for more than a decade because a derelict world war two airfield covers a large part of it. The airfield, HMS Jackdaw, never saw a shot fired in anger—indeed, its last use was as a language school where potential British spies learned Russian during the cold war. In its

wisdom, Historic Scotland slapped an A listing on the whole site, and the argument has rumbled on as to how much of his own land the farmer might be able to develop. The bill will do nothing to help to resolve that situation.

Secondly, there is the case of Crawford priory, which is situated in an overgrown wood near Cupar. This unremarkable Victorian pile carries a B listing and is currently in a ruinous state. Its owner feels that it is well past saving, and the building is currently a hazard to children and others who walk in the wood. Because of the listing, Historic Scotland says that the owner must keep the building safe, while not allowing him to demolish it. However, as Historic Scotland has no funds to make any financial contribution to keeping it safe, the bill will do nothing to help to resolve the owner's plight.

Finally, Kilrymont Road school building in St Andrews, which is a dreary example of 1960s municipal architecture, is scheduled for demolition when the proposed single-site Madras college goes ahead. By some bizarre quirk of architectural judgment, a pagoda-like edifice that is stuck on the top of that concrete barracks has won B listing, and apparently cannot be torn down. The result is stalemate, and again the current bill will do nothing to help to resolve the situation.

The bill is officially described as a technical tidying-up exercise, and I agree. What is clearly long overdue is legislation that completely updates the planning and listing procedures in relation to our historic environment. To Fiona Hyslop, who has previously indicated that she does not see the need for such legislation, I offer a seasonal and friendly reminder of the bard's predictive message: minister, it's coming yet for a' that.

15:14

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I got so carried away listening to Ted Brocklebank that I did not realise that it was my turn next.

I thank all those who have been involved with the bill, particularly those who gave evidence to us and have continued to contact us about the bill to offer their opinions. The committee clerks deserve our thanks for their efforts in making the bill process run smoothly, and I thank the minister and her civil servants for their efforts and engagement with the committee.

At stage 1, the bill received broad support. At stage 2, only a few amendments were debated. I am pleased to put on record again our support for the bill and the principles that are behind it. Ted Brocklebank is right: it is a technical tidying-up bill. I am sure that each of us could come up with anomalies of the listing system in our constituencies that act against development and

are against common sense. Local debate sometimes takes place about why some places have been listed, but that goes beyond what we are debating.

We welcome the bill's aim to address gaps and weaknesses in current legislation, as highlighted in the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland's 2006 report, which said that heritage legislation needed to be reviewed. Provisions on the recovery of grants, the recovery of debts, urgent repairs, the modification of the defence of ignorance and the extension of notices are particularly notable and should be of value in helping to preserve the environment for future generations.

I associate myself totally with Des McNulty's points about Scotland's battlefields. We welcome the inclusion of an inventory of battlefields in the bill. Those of us who have had the pleasure of seeing the facility at Culloden will have seen exactly what can be done in relation to a battlefield to tell Scotland's story effectively and will know the value of that. A visitor centre of the complexity and scale of that at Culloden would not be justified for all Scotland's battlefields, but a story of Scotland's history can be told at the battlefield sites around the country. That is valuable.

The historic environment is all around us and contributes particularly to the character and value of all our landscapes. It gives us an important understanding of how our landscapes and seascapes have developed and a sense of how people used and travelled across our country.

In Scotland, our sense of history is particularly strong. The environment that is around us provides us with a locally distinctive character. It also provides a wide range of benefits—from the tangible effects of tourism to the less tangible boost that we get from having a sense of place and community. That is why I welcomed Karen Whitefield's stage 2 amendment 14, which will give local authorities more power to encourage maintenance work to enhance monuments and buildings, even if they are not in danger. The swell of local popular feeling on the doocot in Karen Whitefield's constituency highlighted well the importance of sites of interest to local people. It matters to people if a piece of local architecture or the built environment is in disrepair and is unloved and uncared for, because that says something about the heart of the community. Karen Whitefield's amendment was welcome.

Our historic sites sit at the heart of our place making. They act as a catalyst for regeneration and provide an opportunity for people to get involved. I have commented on the role of volunteers. Research that was done in 2006 identified that more than 12,000 people throughout Scotland spend a total of 167,000 hours every

year on helping with our historic environment through their enthusiasm and creativity. I have mentioned before Cramond Heritage Trust in my constituency, which involves a dedicated group of enthusiasts who have done fantastic work over the years on the Roman fort, the iron mills and so on at Cramond. We all have such groups in our constituencies, and we owe them a big vote of thanks.

Amendment 14, which was agreed to at stage 2, will not place financial burdens on local authorities and is welcome. It is also welcome that, despite her initial concerns, the minister has not lodged a stage 3 amendment to overturn the stage 2 position.

During stage 2, Ken Macintosh moved an amendment to place a duty on ministers to give relevant bodies guidance on how those bodies could contribute to preserving the historic environment. I welcome the minister's comments today about information and guidance that will be given.

"Heritage Counts 2010", which was published last October, focused on the economic benefits of the historic environment throughout the United Kingdom. Many of its case studies focused on English heritage sites, but some of the figures are interesting. A key finding was that £1 of investment in historic visitor attractions generates £1.60 of additional economic activity. Another finding was that investment in the historic environment attracts businesses: one in four agreed that the environment around them is an important factor in deciding to locate—the same proportion that found access roads important. We should never underestimate the fact that, for many businesses, the historic environment around them is fundamental to their business and to attracting people to the area.

Overall, the historic environment sector is estimated to contribute in excess of £2.3 billion to Scotland. What we are doing today will assist in ensuring that that continues into the future. At a time when we are feeling the pinch—that is certainly the case for many industries and job markets in Scotland—it is noticeable that the tourism industry is one sector that is holding its own. If ever we were to turn our back on the tourism industry, it would be a very bad move in economic terms, never mind anything else. The historic environment plays a crucial part in all of that.

There is no doubt that preserving, enhancing and promoting the historic environment brings tangible benefits and value. Far from the listing and planning system being a barrier to change—which is how we see it at times—if its value is recognised and used imaginatively, the historic

environment can open up real opportunities for our communities.

The reforms in the bill will improve heritage protection and create a more efficient system; one that, I hope, will widen public involvement and improve economic opportunities.

15:21

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Some members who are my age might remember the actor Moultrie Kelsall, the man who got all the gloomy Scots roles that did not go to John Laurie. He was also a pioneer foodie and no mean architectural critic. In the columns of *The Scotsman* he rounded frequently on those people who were out to look at the environment and say, "There's an auld hoose. Ding it doon!" At the time, that was no idle threat. My friend Robin Cook, a man of waspish intellect, in referring to a planning convener in Glasgow in the late 1960s, said, "That man's real ambition is to knock down every listed building in the place."

John Hume—a name to conjure with in architectural circles—and I made a programme for transmission by the Open University on the industrial archaeology of Glasgow. It was the OU's first programme in Scotland. Lo and behold, within two years of doing that, most of the industrial archaeology had disappeared.

Behind the technicalities of the bill that we say farewell to today is the issue that the problems that accelerating technical change and ecological demands are posing could all too easily prejudice the future of historical and attractive buildings, unless we can find a use for them and see that they are treated and handled in ways that will enliven the public life of the places in which they are situated.

For instance, in my constituency centre of Kirkcaldy we have the beautiful art nouveau Station hotel, which would make a marvellous Jack Vettriano art gallery. No artist has celebrated the transient lives of hotels more than Kirkcaldy's best. The building is still shuttered, and perhaps awaits the inevitable visit of a vandal that leads to outright demolition. We also have in Kirkcaldy the merchant's house, which was restored in 2004 to the tune of £6 million and has yet to receive a tenant. The issue is not only restoration but finding uses for such property.

I am slightly dubious about the logic of the Law Society of Scotland's briefing on the bill stressing property development. In Edinburgh, we have suffered from quite a lot of property development. I gaze at the hideous shuttered frontage of new St Andrew's house—if ever Thatcherism had a face in Scotland, by God, that building was it—or at the Appleton tower, which disfigures what remains of

George Square. If the bill can help to prevent the building of what John Betjeman called “rent-collecting slabs”—think of the Caltongate proposals—it will have my heartfelt support.

I will make two further points. First, it is important to balance the conservation of the environment with conservation of the pockets of the people who must live in it. Often, cheap-jack modernisation methods can be applied to buildings: think of the horrible plastic astragals that are inserted into double glazing to try to make it look historical, which do not show up at all, as they do not have anything like the right proportions. Surely we can design a way out of those. On the other hand, a constituent of mine in Kirkcaldy who lives in an unlisted property near a B-listed building cannot get permission from the local council to install any sort of double glazing, even though the listed building does not have the original fittings on its windows. Inevitably, that type of bureaucracy is frustrating to authority and inhabitant alike.

Secondly, Scotland’s historic environment must be a living environment. Some landmarks are fragile—think of the appalling fate of Rosslyn chapel at the hands of Dan Brown—but our historic buildings and sites ought to be accessible to local communities and visitors alike, if their condition allows for it.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Christopher Harvie: No, I am just about to close.

As meeting halls, community centres and museums, many historic buildings in Scotland can and do draw together communities and root them in their living environment and in history. Just think of what I hope will be 2011’s building of the year—that amazing classical building in the middle of Greenlaw, the town hall, which stands almost within the parish of Hume. In 2011, we will celebrate the tercentenary of sinful Davey. What a magnificent place the town hall would be in which to celebrate the imagination of Scottish architecture. It could act as a sort of temple of humanism, if I may attempt a ghastly pun, in this historic year and remind us of the environment that lies everywhere to our hand in Scotland—an environment that we must and can protect.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Although speeches should be limited to four minutes, I can give members an extra minute.

15:27

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I welcome the passing of the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill today. It may not be

the most exciting bill to have come before Parliament, but it will have a positive and lasting effect on the built and natural environment.

I thank those who have participated in the legislative scrutiny of the bill, including members of and clerks to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, of which I am convener. I also thank the minister and her civil servants for their efforts in progressing the bill. Finally, I thank the organisations that helped both the Government and the committee to shape the bill, including the Built Environment Forum Scotland, Archaeology Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

As members are aware—and as other speakers have said—the bill is an amending bill that addresses issues that local and central Government have highlighted, and it follows extensive consultation by Historic Scotland. The bill harmonises the legislation that covers the environment, scheduled monuments and listed buildings. It does so by amending three existing acts: the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953, to allow ministers to specify the amount of grant that can be recovered if conditions of grant are breached or a building is sold within 10 years; the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, to amend certain provisions relating to scheduled monuments; and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, to amend provisions on listed buildings.

Members will recall that at stage 1 few concerns were raised and that only a handful of amendments were lodged for stage 2. One of the amendments, which has already been spoken about by my colleague Margaret Smith, was lodged by me—rather unusually, for a convener. It related to a doocot, and the minister herself suggested that it will forever be known as the doocot amendment. The idea for it came from representations that I had received from a constituent, who had experienced some difficulty in his attempts to ensure that an historic doocot adjacent to his property was properly maintained by its owner. The local authority has attempted to reach an agreed solution with the property owner, but with no success. The council claims that current legislation does not enable it to undertake works and then re-charge the owner.

My amendment was an attempt to improve the situation—not to force owners of historic monuments or listed buildings to undertake unnecessary work, but to ensure that we step in at a much earlier stage sometimes, before a building falls into such a state of disrepair that it is dangerous. There was some confusion about interpretation of the legislation, and some local authorities felt that further clarity was necessary.

I thank members of the Built Environment Forum Scotland, who provided assistance with the drafting of my amendment, and I also thank Archaeology Scotland, which supported it. I was pleased that a majority of committee members agreed with the amendment. I am particularly pleased that the minister, despite her reservations about the amendment's being unnecessary, has chosen not to attempt to overturn it at stage 3. My constituents in Cairnhill in Airdrie will be pleased and relieved, and they will be looking forward to having their concerns addressed when the bill becomes an act.

As I stated at stage 1, there are a number of reasons why it is important that we protect and conserve our natural and built environment. First, it is right that we preserve relics and monuments for the value that they provide in understanding our history and our cultural heritage. In addition, many buildings, monuments and other sites possess significant intrinsic beauty and aesthetic merit, and for that reason alone they deserve our protection.

Finally, and further to my previous two points, there is the benefit that our cultural heritage bestows upon the Scottish economy. An illustration of that is provided in the briefing paper from the Built Environment Forum Scotland for today's debate, which points out that the historic environment sector is estimated to contribute in excess of £2.3 billion to Scotland's gross value added, the bulk of it coming from tourism expenditure.

I welcome the passing of the bill, which deserves the Parliament's full support.

15:33

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): A friend of mine with whom I had lunch today asked me what the Scottish Parliament was talking about this afternoon. I said, "We're debating the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill." He said, "Nothing new there, then."

As is demonstrated by the absence of amendments at stage 3, the bill has been developed by the Parliament in a consensual manner to address an issue that, although it is fairly technical, has a great impact on the communities that we serve.

The need for a significant refresh and consolidation of law in the area can be seen from the fact that the three principal acts that will be amended by the bill date from 1953, 1979 and 1997. Over the 60 years since the passage of the first of those acts, a great deal has changed in how we view our environment and the threats that face it, and in our approach to dealing with the

landmarks that we have created over many centuries.

The consensus around the bill developed before it reached Parliament. It grew out of joint working involving both of the national agencies concerned—Historic Scotland and the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland—as well as Scotland's local authorities, which bear an increasing level of responsibility for managing all aspects of our environment, including the preservation of Scotland's historic buildings and places. All those bodies are on the front line when the demands of today's society and economy clash with the objective of protecting—and, wherever possible, providing access to—Scotland's rich historic environment. As they discharge their responsibilities, it is right that they have a legislative framework that is clear in its objectives and that properly allocates both the responsibility and the powers that are needed to achieve those objectives.

I will give an example from my constituency of the challenges that those who are working to protect our historic environment face. The King's theatre—or the ABC cinema, as it is probably known to most people locally—was built in the early part of the 20th century and could hold about 2,000 patrons for a single show. It hosted operas, variety shows and musical extravaganzas, and it invited minors—young people—to attend on Saturday mornings in advance of the showing of a movie. I admit to being one of the kids who turned up with a sword in advance of the "Ivanhoe" movie. The theatre showed some of the early moving pictures and, by 1937, had caught up with changing fashions and so became a cinema, and added a balcony.

Unfortunately, the interior of the building was devastated by fire in 1975, having been converted to a multiplex. It was eventually closed in 1999 and, sadly, remains out of use to this day. The building retains its fine Edwardian baroque frontage—I know because it faces my constituency office. However, despite being a grade B listed building, the old theatre is simply rotting away inside. A fine specimen of a tree now grows out of the frontage and is causing unknown damage. Despite the efforts of East Ayrshire Council, the owner has allowed the tree to continue growing. Therefore, I welcome the fact that part 3 of the bill will strengthen local authorities' ability to deal with buildings that are simply being allowed to deteriorate, and to recover their expenses. I look forward to the act coming into effect, at which point I will press for the strongest possible action to arrest the decline of that fine old building.

That building also demonstrates the need for flexibility. What exactly would we be preserving?

Much, if not all, of the original interior has already disappeared through fire, redevelopment and neglect. We need a system that is flexible enough to secure the retention of that which is worth retaining, even if that means a degree of modification in the nature of the building's use or in the restoration techniques or materials that can be used. In recent years, local authorities have been encouraged and supported in taking greater responsibility for the historic environment. I encourage the continuation of that approach as the act is rolled out, in the hope that the old King's theatre—or the ABC cinema—in Kilmarnock can find a new purpose befitting its historic importance to the town.

15:37

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and I thank the committee for the work that it has done, especially because it worked so well in co-operation with the minister that there is no need for us to discuss amendments at stage 3.

All of us, wherever we represent, appreciate the importance of the historic built environment, whether it be the national icons such as the Borders abbeys, New Lanark and Edinburgh castle or the smaller, more local icons that communities cherish, which tell stories of local history that sometimes have national or even international significance. Historic buildings can provoke strong emotions, either in those who believe that they must be preserved at all costs, or in those who are keen to pull them down.

Having listened to Ted Brocklebank's speech, I again lament his decision to stand down at the next election. Surely, a member's bill on listing would have been worth coming back for. Maybe his successor will take on the task. All of us could provide similar examples from our constituencies of the listing system having detrimental effects on development or on communities, but perhaps that is for another day. Maybe nobody will want to take on that little gem.

As other members have done, I congratulate Karen Whitefield on the success of her doocot amendment—as it will now always be known. Many of us can think of examples of historic buildings in our constituencies that are not yet falling down about us or that have not yet reached such a state of wrack and ruin that local authorities are able to intervene, but about which there is real concern that, if steps are not taken, that will happen. Willie Coffey just gave us such an example from his constituency.

Carluke parish historical society, in my constituency, has been trying for many years to get action taken on High mill there, but that has

not been an easy task, due to the mill's having a hostile owner, if I may say that. That is why I welcome the provisions that have been introduced by Karen Whitefield's amendment, and I hope that we will be able to make some progress as a result of the bill and the amendment.

Communities cherish those kinds of historic buildings, which tell the story of the community, of the people who lived there and made the community what it is, and of the industry that went on there. It is important that we are able to keep those buildings and that they are not only historic sites but are, as Willie Coffey said, capable of being developed and used as something else, so that they can be used by a new generation in appropriate ways.

I welcome the fact that the bill will standardise legislation. It is important that we get things standardised again in this area.

It is important that we have an opportunity to put on record again this Parliament's support for the historic built environment and to say that it is not just bricks and mortar, but something that tells the story of who we are and where we have come from.

I am proud to represent New Lanark, which tells the story of Scotland's social history and marks the fact that we no longer send children to work in mills, or anywhere else, at the age of eight. Our social history is part of our historic built environment—we cannot separate the two. If we forget the history of the buildings, we might forget the history of the people who worked and lived in those buildings.

I am thankful that we have taken forward this piece of legislation, because the buildings around us shape and frame the people we are and the country we live in.

I am happy to have been able to participate in the debate and will support the bill at 5 o'clock tonight.

15:42

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): I declare an interest, as I am the occupier and joint owner of a property that is listed as being worthy of statutory protection under the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997.

When I spoke at the stage 1 debate last November, I took the opportunity to berate authorities, including the University of Edinburgh, for the architectural vandalism that has defaced our marvellous capital city in the past, and for some of the eyesores that had taken the place of Georgian or Victorian good taste. The subsequent reaction to that contribution was interesting, with

some agreeing whole-heartedly while others, assuming that I was some sort of opponent of modern architecture, said that I wanted to preserve the past in aspic. Indeed, there was a long correspondence in the local newspaper on the subject.

Before going further, I will clarify and correct a misunderstanding that arose at that time. I want to make it clear that my criticism of the University of Edinburgh was of the university of 50 years ago, not the wise and enlightened authorities of today. I need to make that point before I go to the next graduate meeting.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the member sympathise with many of my constituents in Acharacle, who will be disappointed that the bill will do nothing to address the issue of Castle Tioram, whose owner has spent 14 years trying to restore a Scottish heirloom of great importance, which is falling into the sea?

Ian McKee: I share the member's concern about Castle Tioram and acknowledge that the bill does not address such matters. However, I support what is in the bill. The issue that Mr McGrigor raises could be the subject of the bill that Ted Brocklebank's successor might bring to the next session of Parliament.

One of the most difficult tasks that we face in this field is to sort out the wheat from the chaff and decide which buildings can be preserved and which can make way for the architecture of today and tomorrow. In a way, the older a building is, the easier it is to do that, partly because a really old building, by its very survival over the ages, has proved a point and also because tastes have settled. However, it is much more difficult with relatively new buildings.

In the stage 1 debate, I mentioned with distaste what I consider to be the neo-brutalist monstrosity that is the New Club building in Princes Street, which replaced a splendid Victorian building, only to be contradicted by an architect who contends that it is a marvellous example of the genre. He might be right, so if I had any influence in the matter of preservation, I would give way on that point. However, even I cannot be convinced of the merits of slab buildings such as the soon-to-be-demolished New St Andrew's house or the southern facade of Argyle house in Castle Terrace, which was erected in 1968 and which has been the home of various Government departments. However, others can be convinced and the debate goes on.

It is important that the bill harmonises existing legislation. That is in response not only to consultation, but to the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland's "Report and recommendations on whether there is a need to

review heritage protection legislation in Scotland". The bill works in harmony with non-legislative steps, such as the growth in partnership working between Historic Scotland and local authorities, and so gives our historic environment increased protection. Among other things, it will lower the bar from damage of scheduled monuments to disturbance of them; bring fines for damage to monuments into line with those for environmental crimes that are regulated by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage; and give ministers greater rights to require the reversal of unauthorised works.

Our historic environment is not just a pleasant facility for those of us who are lucky enough to live in Scotland; it is also one of the most potent attractions for visitors and has been estimated to contribute more than £2.3 billion annually to the national gross value added element of our gross domestic product. The Built Environment Forum Scotland estimates that in 2008, 12,449 volunteers carried out a total of 167,721 hours of work, as Margaret Smith mentioned. That illustrates the enthusiasm that people have for our historic environment. I support the bill and commend it to the Parliament.

15:47

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): The lack of stage 3 amendments to the bill is, I am sure, as much a tribute to its perfection as proposed legislation as it is to the unassailable nature of the arguments that were advanced in its favour at stage 1, which I will try not to repeat too tryingly today.

Maintaining historic buildings is not a simple matter and is certainly not the same as merely preserving historic ruins. The need for pragmatism and adaptation is clear, if our built heritage is to have a function in the future. Similarly, the relevant legislation needs to adapt and survive.

I hope that the bill will considerably improve the protection that is given to our built environment in a way that does not place unreasonable burdens on private stakeholders. However, the bill has at its core the concept of public benefit. For instance, it will explicitly enable the Scottish ministers to recover grants in the event that specific preconditions of those grants are violated. That is one of the many examples of how the bill takes a responsible stance on public expenditure.

One innovative aspect of the bill on which I would like to dwell briefly, as other members have done, is the inventory of important Scottish battlefields. There was discussion in the committee and elsewhere about vexed questions of definition and disputed locations of battlefields. I can think of one such dispute in my constituency

that led ultimately to the comment by one person whom I know that, if the battle had taken place on the site that was suggested, any graves would long since have fallen victim to generations of peat cutting.

Those occasional difficulties of definition aside, however, it must ultimately be a positive step to recognise formally the existence of battle sites that are of national importance. The inventory of battlefields will give formal recognition for the first time to those sites, many of which are central to Scottish history and, in some cases, to our existence as a nation.

We are fortunate that some battlefields, such as the scene of King Robert the Bruce's victory at Bannockburn during the wars of independence, have a memorial and a visitor centre and are well known to the public. Incidentally, and unsurprisingly, I do not share the well-publicised horror that some members have expressed that schools run school trips to see Bannockburn and are encouraged to do so by the Scottish Government.

However, many battlefields are less well known and have been subject to various changes in land use and to uncontrolled metal detecting, which can raise archaeological as well as ethical questions. An inventory of battlefields will start to address those issues, but in a pragmatic way. If a battlefield has been ploughed or grazed since the day after the battle took place, which most of the ones in Scotland probably have been, there is no suggestion that the bill seeks to get in the way of agricultural activity continuing.

It is clear that there is wide support for the bill. The Built Environment Forum Scotland, for one, has strongly endorsed it, saying that it will go "a significant way" to ensuring consistency between elements of the historic environment legislation and the planning regime, as others have pointed out. The organisation points out that even if Scotland's built environment did not have an incalculable cultural value, it makes an enormous contribution to our country's economy.

The bill is a reasonable and sensible means of updating and clarifying in law the protection that, as a country, we rightly extend to our built heritage. In that spirit, I commend it to the chamber.

15:51

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): I am pleased to wind up on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. It is slightly concerning that when I started my research for my speech, one of the first things that happened was that a note from the official reporters during the stage 1 debate fell out of one

of my documents. That gives an indication of how often I have looked at them since then.

Nevertheless, it is an important bill, which the policy memorandum describes as

"an amending piece of legislation which consists of a series of provisions identified by central and local government, and during the course of discussion with other stakeholders during 2007, which followed the publication of a report by the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland on the need for a review of heritage legislation in Scotland."

That report was produced in 2006.

The policy memorandum goes on to say:

"The Bill is designed as a tightly focused technical amending Bill to improve the management and protection of Scotland's historic environment. It has been drafted with the intention of avoiding placing significant new burdens or duties on public or private bodies or individuals and implementation costs are expected to be minimal."

In that context, it is understandable why so few amendments were needed at stage 2 and why none was needed at stage 3. The bill has been in gestation for a considerable length of time and will provide very little in the way of additional burdens. I welcome the work that Government ministers and the committee have done to ensure that the bill has got to this stage without the need for significant amendment.

Many things can be said in today's stage 3 debate that were probably said in the stage 1 debate. I begin by referring to some of the points that my colleague—I say "colleague" in the sense that the region that he represents includes my constituency—

Ted Brocklebank: What about the coalition?

Iain Smith: We are not in coalition up here, Ted.

The situations at Crail airfield, Crawford priory and the Kilrymont Road school building—which particularly irks me—that he referred to are all ones that I could equally well refer to.

Another example that I will mention is the Scottish Fisheries Museum, which hoped to put on the side of its building a wheelhouse that would have overlooked the sea and allowed people to play with some of the navigation equipment and see what was in the Firth of Forth. It was not allowed to do so because the museum is a listed building in a conservation area. That was a piece of nonsense, because it would have been an excellent new facility that would have enhanced the area, but Historic Scotland got in the way.

I well recollect from my previous life as a councillor that when Falkland High Street was due to be repaved, the council was keen to put in some nice granite setts but was told by Historic Scotland that it had to keep the existing rather nasty concrete pavement, which had probably

been put there in the 1960s, because it was a conservation area. I wondered whether it also had to keep the potholes and the other things that it was trying to get rid of. That sort of nonsense gives Historic Scotland a bad name. I hope that the minister and others are working to deal with that.

We need to consider issues that were mentioned during the stage 1 debate, such as how we can put double glazing and improved environmental measures into historic buildings to bring them up to modern standards while preserving their basic characteristics. One of the reasons for listing is that people do not want building redevelopments that are sometimes described as vandalism, but sometimes listing can amount to vandalism in that it can prevent sensitive redevelopment of buildings. Buildings are living creatures that need to be adapted and changed to meet modern needs and uses. On Leith waterfront, buildings that used to be warehouses and bonded stores have been converted into flats, shops and restaurants, thereby breathing new life into that community. Had they been left as historic but empty warehouses, that community would have been dead. Who would want to go to see Leith waterfront if it was a bunch of derelict warehouses? Castle Tioram is another example of where we might need to be a bit more imaginative.

I conclude by mentioning the wider review of environment legislation that will be needed, perhaps during the next parliamentary session. The minister might not be too keen on that, but it was one of the things that was referred to by George Reid in his report for the National Trust for Scotland, "Fit for Purpose" when he said that there was no

"immediate need for new NTS legislation"

but that

"In several years' time, however, a new Act of the Scottish Parliament will be necessary to codify the reform process and to address any other issues which NTS then feels appropriate."

In that, George Reid was referring to some of the wider issues that his report referred to about the need for environmental bodies, such as Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and the Historic Houses Association for Scotland to work together to help to protect our historic environment. That wider review is necessary and the next Parliament will have to come back to it.

15:55

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This has been a largely consensual debate on many fronts, which is perhaps not surprising because it would be very hard to argue against the

main principles of the bill. It has also been a very interesting debate and, as Ted Brocklebank said, it must continue. The fact that there have been so few amendments is becoming a major debating point, but it does not suggest that parliamentary scrutiny has been any less rigorous. It has been more rigorous, and we should bear that in mind.

The bill was set out as a technical amending bill rather than one of substantial import and substance, but it has encompassed some extremely important points of detail and it has raised important issues about legal interpretation. I will come back to that later.

As many members have said this afternoon, Scotland's historic environment is the very precious fabric of this country. It is one of the most defining aspects of Scotland and it can bring enormous social and economic benefit, most especially in the form of visitor income. The bill matters even if it will not necessarily hit the headlines in the same way as many other items of parliamentary legislation would.

Of course, the minimal cost involved was also in the bill's favour. That was a pleasant change as far as the Government was concerned. Perhaps that is one reason why the bill has progressed a little more smoothly than most.

When it comes to the front line in the protection of our historic environment, there are many legal issues. At stage 1, many people made a powerful case for the general principles of the bill and its prime objective, which is to preserve and enhance Scotland's historic environment for future generations. They made some points of legal detail. The comments were informed, and I pay tribute to the many people who gave us evidence and played a supporting role. Their deliberations were balanced and informative, and the briefings that we have received since have also been helpful.

I note the comments, made by various members, about there being a need for clarification in several areas and perhaps a little need for the streamlining of the administration of our historical environment. That point was picked up by several speakers during today's debate and by several key stakeholders throughout the earlier stages. There can be no objection about the need for greater clarity, especially when it comes to the interpretation of existing legislation, notwithstanding the current need to make the legislation compatible with the Valletta convention.

For example, at stage 2 there was an interesting debate surrounding amendment 14—the doocot amendment—and what circumstances have to pertain before a local council can or, perhaps more important, should use its powers of intervention. The committee convener raised the

issue following a constituency issue that had questioned what constituted a state of danger. The minister was very clear in her evidence on 15 December 2010 that powers exist to do something about that, but committee members needed to make up their minds about whether they were being used appropriately. That is quite an important issue as we bring the bill to its conclusion. There seemed to be some doubt in the minds of various councils, so there was ambiguity on that point. We should bear that in mind for the future.

Secondly, there was much debate about the defence of ignorance in section 3, particularly the possibility of all but removing the defence. There are genuine situations in which human error can occur. We had to be conscious that the problem could be compounded if a lack of clarity about what constitutes an historic monument continues.

Thirdly, there was the issue of the production of certain inventories. Like any taxonomy, they are open to interpretation—a point made by others in their stage 1 contributions. Although I would argue that difficulty should never be a reason for not doing something that is worth while, we urged caution when it came to section 11, where the bill attempts to deal with responsibilities.

Ted Brocklebank made the point that the jury is still out, not least because of some of the divisions of opinion that exist between the committee and stakeholder groups. Notwithstanding that, we give our full support to the bill.

16:00

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I shall start by making the point that all my Labour colleagues and, I think, every other speaker has made—we welcome the bill. It is a technical, amending measure that is tightly drawn and, in the Government's own words, tightly focused, but it will help to harmonise existing legislation, close the odd gap or loophole in the law and clarify the grant recovery process. Perhaps the most significant and welcome addition is the new statutory duty to compile and maintain inventories of battlefields, historic gardens and designed landscapes.

Like others, I thank all those who gave evidence on the bill, our clerks and drafting team, and the minister and her team. Like Karen Whitefield, I give a special mention to the Built Environment Forum Scotland, which gave a lot of its time at stage 2.

I have made it clear from the outset that we welcome and support the bill because I want to use my remarks in closing the debate for Labour to highlight the worries that remain, despite the consensus on the bill. Even after we pass the bill

this afternoon, I am not convinced that we will have sent out a strong or clear enough message about the importance of the historic environment or that we will have done enough to challenge the negative attitudes and prejudices that exist.

The bill makes a number of welcome reforms, but it is another Government proposal that comes without a financial resolution. That is a crucial point, because one of the key drivers behind the bill was the desire to ensure that no additional costs are placed on local authorities. This is an incredibly difficult time for all those in charge of public services and budgets. No one here disagrees with the policy intention, but the desire to ensure that the bill came with no added costs established the limits of the bill's ambition from the outset.

The bill was never going to be anything other than an attempt to tidy up legislation, and to my mind it shies away from tackling any underlying concerns about our historic environment and the protection it should enjoy. Ted Brocklebank outlined the fact that a number of issues are still to be tackled, as did Iain Smith in his closing remarks by quoting George Reid's comment that we will have to return to the issue. Even Ian McKee, in reply to Jamie McGrigor's intervention, accepted that the bill does not address some of the problems that face us today. I believe that the bill is worth while and non-contentious but ultimately unambitious, and I argue that we should be doing more to protect and enhance our historic environment.

We are lucky to live in an incredibly accessible historic environment. As many members have emphasised today, our heritage is important to us and, if I may say so, impressive. We have an unrivalled written, visual and archaeological record of our past going back centuries—not in the shape of museum pieces but surrounding us in our everyday lives. In his opening remarks, Des McNulty talked about the diversity and rich architectural heritage of Glasgow, but when I was walking down the Royal Mile this morning to Parliament, with the new town to the north and the closes of the medieval city of Edinburgh running off either side of the street and with Holyrood palace and the remains of Holyrood abbey right beside this iconic building, I found it difficult not to be impressed by that history in the context of a modern, dynamic and purposeful city.

This is a history and environment that draws people to Scotland and is undoubtedly a mainstay of our tourism industry. That point was made by both Karen Whitefield and Ian McKee, who talked about the £2.3 billion that it may contribute to our economy. However, it is also a heritage that matters to those of us who live, work and wish to raise our families here—to know who we are.

Karen Gillon put the point nicely when she said that our historic environment helps to shape and frame the country and people we are.

Having said how impressive I believe our historic environment is, I must admit that, in looking at and taking evidence on the bill, I could not help but be struck once more by the fact that as humans we are simply scratching the surface of the land that we inhabit and inherit. There are ancient structures to see, including medieval castles such as Dirlerton castle just down the road and the burial chambers in Orkney, but much more of our past, however majestic in its own day, has already crumbled into decay.

The monuments and historical artefacts of our predecessors that do exist, when uncovered, often call to mind the hollow words of Shelley's Ozymandias:

"Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

We need to consciously choose and act to protect that from the past which we deem important, not for the ego of those who built it, but for our own sake and for future generations.

There are plenty of philistines. We have only to look at our high streets to see that, whatever our intention as expressed in the Parliament, it is not universally shared. I was struck by the number of speakers this afternoon who were able to list the failings and difficulties in our planning system. Ted Brocklebank did that in his opening speech, but so did Professor Harvie, Willie Coffey, Karen Gillon and Jamie McGrigor. They all highlighted the fact that there are difficulties with the listing and planning system as it operates at present. Main streets in Scotland have become bland and homogeneous. They are often indistinguishable from each other. There are examples of that even here, in historic Edinburgh. George Square was alluded to by Dr McKee, but Princes Street is hardly testimony to a commitment to our historic environment.

It is especially worrying that the expertise that is needed to make judgments about what is worth keeping and what is not is in danger of being lost. I will refer to a couple of surveys. The first was done by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, which is the professional body for conservationists. Its director, Séan O'Reilly, said:

"The current investigation reveals conservation services that are teetering on the edge. The cutbacks that we all see coming, if not carefully directed, will disenfranchise from the democratic planning processes many of the local communities that value and help care for their historic places."

We have heard concerns even more directly from a Government agency. The research by the Historic Environment Advisory Council for

Scotland is a couple of years old, but having surveyed local authorities, the council stated:

"the survey and case study interviews showed that the workload focus was on meeting statutory requirements and even this was not at desirable levels, for example: record keeping and monitoring were not as good as they should have been; availability of expert advice was restricted; enforcement activity was very low ... In relation to more proactive activities, the ability of many authorities to work up new projects, seek support funding and intervene to save/improve buildings was limited."

It is a rather worrying time and these are difficult decisions. We get attached to buildings, and judgment is required to make decisions about them, but when public and local authorities are faced with cuts and savings to be made, does anyone think that the archaeology services will be kept or given the same recognition as education or care for the elderly?

On top of the need to make informed choices as to the significance of certain buildings, we were reminded in evidence that the vast majority of our historic environment is not listed, recorded or scheduled. In some cases it has to be unearthed and identified. We seem to be reliant on television shows and bidding wars against other parts of the country to protect even the most high-profile buildings and structures.

To conclude, there are a number of issues that will continue to need our attention, but the bill marks a step forward and it is to be welcomed by everyone in the Parliament.

16:08

Fiona Hyslop: I thank members for a lively, informed and interesting debate. Although we send Pauline McNeill our best wishes, I think we benefited from Des McNulty's experience and his recollections of the experience of Glasgow. He made the point, as did Ted Brocklebank, that whatever criticisms there might be of the scope of the bill, it contains practical measures. Indeed, he reflected that, had those measures been in place 10 or 15 years ago, some of the practical issues that he mentioned would have been addressed.

The debate has been constructive and the discussion has clearly demonstrated the extent to which we all care about the appropriate protection and management of Scotland's historic environment. I have been struck, as I was at stage 1, by members' affection, passion and loyalty to their sense of place in their communities, and by how, as MSPs, they seek to promote their areas. That is important. I am happy to note that there is broad support for the bill throughout the chamber and I have enjoyed listening to the comments that colleagues have made.

I want to comment on the information that will be provided about the bill. I reaffirm that the

legislation will be accompanied by an awareness-raising and education programme, which will be taken forward by Historic Scotland. The process has begun. Members might be interested to know that, as part of the programme, the Scottish Government has produced an information booklet in liaison with key stakeholders called "Managing and Protecting our Historic Environment: What is Changing? The Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill Explained." The booklet provides readers with an overview of the existing historic environment protection regime and sets out the changes that will be introduced by the bill. It can be found on the Historic Scotland website.

We will also target owners and occupiers of scheduled monuments to raise awareness of the bill's modifications to defences with regard to unauthorised works affecting those monuments, and my officials will consult stakeholders on the most effective and efficient methods for taking all that forward.

However, in closing, I want to address some of the points that have been raised in the debate. Karen Gillon, Margaret Smith and others touched on the central philosophical issue of telling the story of Scotland and the relation between people and a sense of place. Buildings reflect the story of the people in a place and we must ensure that we bring those forms of identity closer together. Indeed, that is one of the reasons why I promoted and chaired a Historic Scotland seminar called "My Home - My Place - My Scotland" that brought together the different people who can tell the story of Scotland through the built environment. If we can mobilise everyone in an area to do that, we can make a big difference.

Ted Brocklebank: As far as philosophy is concerned, does the minister agree with my view that one of the problems with Historic Scotland, particularly in recent years, is that it appears to have been more interested in preserving sculpted ruins than in developing organically some of the buildings that are important in our past? Should that not be looked at more carefully?

Fiona Hyslop: As part of my leadership in this area I have insisted that Historic Scotland looks at how it behaves and what it is doing. I want to reassure the member about its evident approach to some of the areas of interest that members have highlighted. The organisation's officials are more than happy to meet members of this chamber and local authorities and, indeed, have recently done so in relation to Crail and the St Andrews case. I also reassure Jamie McGrigor that although the case for Castle Tioram has been rejected in the past and although I cannot prejudge the result of any discussions, Historic Scotland has made a fresh approach on the issue

and is actively engaging with the owner on a number of solutions. It is important to put that on the record.

As for the need for legislation, I think Iain Smith might be in danger of misinterpreting George Reid's comments, which were specifically about the governance of the National Trust for Scotland.

The subject of battlefields is very interesting, because the issue there is not just the structures themselves but the fact that they are catalysts for tourism. Indeed, the references to the US civil war and Alasdair Allan's point about the Western Isles demonstrate what could be delivered in that respect.

I am sure that Karen Gillon is aware of this, but the factors to be taken into account in listing and scheduling decisions are set out in the Scottish historic environment policy document. However, there must be more openness, transparency and understanding in that respect and, indeed, the ability to challenge decisions must exist. It is not that we simply seek to stop things happening, but that we have a better understanding of what is going on.

Karen Gillon: People feel frustrated partly because they do not know what goes on. I realise that a whole process has to be gone through but people are still finding out after the fact or are not finding out in time that a building has been listed. That is leading to frustration. I simply believe that there is more to be done in that process.

Fiona Hyslop: I take the point, which is why, with regard to scheduled monuments, the bill contains a provision to proactively ensure that people who are known are contacted. I believe that that represents a sea change.

I thank the Parliament and my colleagues on the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee for their invaluable support during the bill's passage. Moreover, I extend thanks to all the organisations that have made constructive contributions and look forward to including them in continued dialogue to revise SHEP, and to working with them as partners in the bill education programme. We will also consult on the suite of regulations that will be introduced to accompany this bill once enacted.

I want in particular to thank my bill team in Historic Scotland for their hard work throughout the legislative process. The committee has acknowledged their responsiveness to certain issues that were raised during stages 1 and 2.

As I noted in my opening speech, the bill addresses the specific gaps and weaknesses in the current heritage legislation framework that were identified during extensive discussions. It will make a good system better and improve the

regulatory authorities' ability to work with partners to manage Scotland's unique historic legacy.

In voting for the bill, we reaffirm our commitment to the appropriate care, protection and management of our rich historic environment for this and future generations. However, we cannot and must not be complacent; we must ensure that we channel our passion for our built environment constructively and always look at how we might improve provision. After all, we are stewards of that process and must take that responsibility seriously.

I ask that members support the motion and approve the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

“The Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and other subordinate legislation Standing Order rule changes”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7733, in the name of Gil Paterson, on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's report “The Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and other subordinate legislation Standing Order rule changes”.

16:15

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the whole Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee team of officers, clerking staff and members. They have got down to their task and done the job very well, and it has been a pleasure to work with them. I include our two retirees, Angela Constance and Robert Brown. I thank all the people who have been in that team for the way in which they have conducted themselves and the amount of work that they have put in on behalf of the committee and the Parliament.

I am pleased to open this debate on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's third report in 2010, which proposes changes to the standing orders in connection with the Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010. Members will no doubt remember debating the Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Bill last year.

The 2010 act provides for the replacement of three transitional orders made under the Scotland Act 1998 that deal with largely technical matters. The main focus of the report is on changes to reflect the provisions of the act relating to subordinate legislation procedures. The report makes recommendations of three types: it recommends changes as a result of the act; it recommends other minor changes to subordinate legislation rules; and it makes two recommendations that do not require changes to the standing orders.

I will first address changes arising from the 2010 act. The act introduces new terms relating to subordinate legislation, and the committee recommends that those terms should be included in rule 17.6 of the standing orders, which sets out how certain terms will be interpreted in the standing orders. The committee also recommends a change to rule 10.4, to include the new term “negative procedure” and to ensure consistency

with the act by using the wording “the instrument be annulled” in relation to lead committee recommendations.

The 2010 act increases the period between an instrument being laid and its coming into force from 21 days to 28 days. If an instrument is to be brought into force less than 28 days after being laid, an explanation must be provided to the Presiding Officer. To ensure that such explanations form part of the consideration of instruments, the committee recommends a new rule that would require the lead committee to consider the explanation and, if appropriate, draw it to the attention of the Parliament.

The power to change the procedure to which an instrument is subject—for example, from the negative to the affirmative procedure or from the affirmative to the negative procedure—is possibly the most significant change that is provided for in the 2010 act. To provide for that in the standing orders, the committee recommends a new rule, under which the initial proposal to change the procedure would be made by the relevant subject committee, which would then report to the Subordinate Legislation Committee that a change was desirable. The Subordinate Legislation Committee would scrutinise the proposal and either agree or disagree with it. If the Subordinate Legislation Committee did not agree with the proposal, no further action would be taken, but if it was agreed to, that committee would put forward a resolution that would invite the Parliament to agree to the change. As set out in the act, it would then be for ministers to decide whether to bring forward the necessary order to allow for the change of procedure.

The committee also recommends a number of changes to the remit of the Subordinate Legislation Committee to link more closely with the terms of the 2010 act. Chapter 10 of the standing orders has not been reviewed properly since the first edition was published, so the committee took the opportunity to consider, with the Subordinate Legislation Committee, the general operation of the rules. As a result, we have proposed six other minor changes.

The first of those is to make it clear that all instruments will be referred to the Subordinate Legislation Committee, even if an instrument is to be considered by Parliament rather than a lead committee. That will ensure consistent technical scrutiny of all instruments.

Allied to that change, the committee proposes changes to rule 10.3.2 and a new rule—10.3.3—to clarify the reporting obligations of the Subordinate Legislation Committee for instruments referred to a lead committee and instruments considered by the Parliament. Under current procedures, the maximum time allowed for debate on motions to

annul an instrument is three minutes for the person moving the motion and the Government speaker. The committee considered that that was too restrictive and would not be sufficient in all circumstances; it felt that such debates are unusual and are likely to need longer debate in most cases. The committee therefore proposes that rule 10.4 should be amended to allow the Parliamentary Bureau to allocate time for such a debate but that the bureau should ensure a minimum of three minutes each for the person moving the motion and the Government speaker.

The final three such changes that the committee proposes are intended to clarify the application of the rules. The changes clarify that rules 10.6.4 and 10.6.5 apply not only to draft instruments but to other affirmative instruments that have been made but which are subject to the approval of the Parliament, and that, under rule 10.8, only draft instruments can be withdrawn.

The final standing order change being recommended by the committee is to rule 10.11, which sets out the way in which the number of days, referred to throughout chapter 10, should be calculated. It is a previously overlooked consequential change related to the session 2 Procedures Committee's 9th report in 2006, to provide that the Subordinate Legislation Committee has 22 days in which to report in certain circumstances.

Finally, I will mention two areas that were considered by the committee but in relation to which we concluded that no changes to standing orders were required. Rule 10.4 provides that there is a 40-day period within which an instrument can be annulled and that a member can lodge a motion to annul up to that point. In practice, as such a motion is for the lead committee to consider and make a recommendation on, it needs to be considered and reported on before the 40-day deadline. To assist lead committees in timetabling consideration of an instrument, an administrative deadline is provided by the clerks to ensure sufficient time for a bureau motion to be lodged if a recommendation to annul is made. To ensure that members who may be considering seeking to annul an instrument are aware of the deadline, the committee recommends that the administrative deadline should be published in section J of the *Business Bulletin*.

The committee also considered a possible conflict between rule 8.2, on motions without notice, and rule 10.4.2, which states that a minister in charge of an instrument is entitled to participate in proceedings on a motion to annul. A member may seek to lodge an annulment motion without notice for consideration by the lead committee. It would be for the convener to judge

whether they wished to accept such a motion. However, the committee noted that accepting such a motion without notice might conflict with rule 10.4.2. The committee concluded that no rule change was required in relation to the possible conflict between those rules but recommends that additional guidance should be produced to highlight the issues that exist and to recommend best practice in relation to specific circumstances.

On behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 3rd Report 2010 (Session 3), *The Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and other subordinate legislation Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 465), and agrees that changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 6 April 2011.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As no other member wishes to speak, that concludes the debate on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee 3rd report 2010.

Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 and Code of Conduct

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on three motions—S3M-7724, S3M-7725 and S3M-7726, all in the name of Gil Paterson, on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's reports on modifications to the schedule to the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006; on determinations to that act; and on proposed changes to the code of conduct for members of the Scottish Parliament.

16:25

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): Members—although there are not many of them here—might be more interested in this debate, which is bit less technical.

The central recommendations before Parliament today were born of the committee's inquiry into registrable interests. Following the passing of the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act in 2006, a new regime came into force at the start of this parliamentary session.

The purpose of the register of interests and of members' declaring relevant interests during parliamentary proceedings is to ensure that the activities of members of Parliament that may impact, or could be perceived to impact, on the manner in which they undertake their duties as parliamentarians are open to scrutiny by the public.

Over the course of this session, the SPPA Committee has considered a number of complaints under the code and members have lodged several hundred register entries. In the light of that experience, some questions arose about the new interests framework, and the committee decided to carry out an inquiry into its operation.

In undertaking the inquiry, the committee was guided by the following principles. First, the register of members' interests should capture significant financial interests. Secondly, that should be done in the simplest possible way to make it as straightforward as possible for members to comply with the registration requirements. Last, but certainly not least, any proposed changes should be in the public interest and ensure that transparency and accountability are maintained. We believe that the inquiry recommendations clarify and simplify the register of members' interests in line with those principles.

The committee proposes the following main changes to the categories of interest in the

schedule to the 2006 act, and corresponding changes to the code. The remuneration category will be merged with the related undertakings category and members will no longer be required to register certain minor interests in that category. The election expenses category will be removed, given that those interests are already captured in members' returns to the Electoral Commission. The information held by the Electoral Commission will be easily accessible on the Parliament's website next session to ensure that anyone seeking the full picture of a member's expenses will be able to view them easily. The sponsorship category will be removed, as its terms overlap significantly with the gifts category. In practice, a limited number of registrations fall under that category, and the majority of those will fall under the gifts category in future. The gifts category will fix the registration threshold for gifts at the start of a session instead of increasing the threshold as and when members' salaries increase. The same change will apply to the heritable property and interest in shares categories. The gifts category will also exempt from registration donations towards election expenses, again because those are captured by the Electoral Commission. The overseas visits category remains unchanged.

The Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 determination 2011, which is set out in annex E of the committee's report, "MSPs' Registrable Interests: Proposed Changes to the Code of Conduct", sets out the form and content of the written statements that members of the Parliament are required to submit to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee clerks at the start of the next session. That determination, which will replace the 2007 determination, reflects the changes to the categories proposed by the committee.

The determination will take effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed. Once that date is definite, the determination will be amended to reflect it.

Once the sums of money equal to 1 per cent and 50 per cent of a member's salary are set out, the determination will be updated to reflect those figures where indicated. That will inform members of the financial thresholds for registering certain categories of interest.

The committee is required to consult Parliament on its recommendations, and so it issued a consultation to all members in June. We offer our thanks to those who responded, including those who responded to confirm that they supported the proposals in full. I also thank the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner for his response, which included his clear support for the recommendations on election expenses.

The committee has made changes to its proposals in response to comments from members, including the removal of a proposal to exempt the requirement to register remuneration by virtue of a member's being a member of a cross-party group.

The committee did not consider it necessary to change its position in response to consultation on points to which it had given close consideration when developing its proposals.

The proposals that are set out in the report will come into force in the next session of Parliament. The changes to the code are mainly a result of the committee's inquiry, but a number of other minor changes are proposed and are set out in the full report.

The committee is very aware of the wider context, and we appreciate that provisions in the Scotland Bill, which is being considered by the United Kingdom Parliament and the Scottish Parliament, may fundamentally change the nature of the members' interests regime. Assuming that the resulting act contains provisions on members' interests, transitional provisions will need to be put in place to allow the Scottish Parliament time to consider whether it wishes to make any fundamental changes to the existing regime. The 2006 act would then need to be amended or possibly even replaced to reflect those changes. As a result, it is likely to take the majority of the next Scottish parliamentary session to implement any significant changes.

The committee's proposed revised categories are therefore likely to be in place for the next parliamentary session. If the interests regime is revised following the implementation of the Scotland Bill, I sincerely hope that the underpinning principles that the committee has used as a basis for making the changes informs the development of any future regime.

I move,

That the Parliament, considering that it is expedient to make certain modifications to the Schedule to the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (asp 12), in exercise of the powers conferred by paragraph 10(1) of that Schedule—

- makes the modifications to that Schedule that are contained in the Annex to this resolution; and
- provides that those modifications shall come into force on the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed.

ANNEXE

MODIFICATIONS TO THE SCHEDULE TO THE INTERESTS OF MEMBERS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ACT 2006

Remuneration

1 (1) In the heading to paragraph 2 (Remuneration) of the Schedule, after “Remuneration” insert “and Related undertaking”.

(2) Paragraph 2 is amended as follows.

(3) At the beginning of that paragraph, insert—

“(A1) Where the circumstances are as described in sub-paragraph (1) or (1A).”

(4) In sub-paragraph (1)(f), delete the words “or any other work”.

(5) After sub-paragraph (1), insert

“(1A) Where a member is, or was—

(a) a director in a related undertaking; or

(b) a partner in a firm,

but does, or did, not receive remuneration by virtue of being such a director or partner.”

(6) In sub-paragraph (2), insert after “corporation” the words “or of Convener, deputy Convener or member of a Committee of the Parliament”.

(7) After sub-paragraph (2), insert—

“(3) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply where the remuneration received from a person on a single, or on more than one, occasion during the current parliamentary session consists solely of expenses unless those expenses amount, or amount in aggregate, to more than the specified limit.

(4) The exception in sub-paragraph (3) applies even although the remuneration received from that person on another occasion, or on other occasions, during that session does not consist solely of expenses.

(5) In this paragraph—

“current parliamentary session” means the parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned;

“a related undertaking” is a parent or subsidiary undertaking of an undertaking of which the member is a director and receives remuneration as a director as mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(d); and

“specified limit” means 1% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

Related undertaking, Election Expenses and Sponsorship

2 Paragraphs 3 (Related Undertaking), 4 (Election expenses) and 5 (Sponsorship) of the Schedule are deleted.

Gifts

3 (1) Paragraph 6 (Gifts) of the Schedule is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1), delete sub-paragraph (a) and the words “(b) that gift meets” and insert—

“(a) in the case where the gift was received

from a person on a single occasion, the value of that gift, at the date on which it was received, exceeds the specified limit; or

(b) in the case where gifts were received from that person on more than one occasion during the current parliamentary session, the aggregate value of those gifts, at the dates on which they were received, exceeds the specified limit and, in either case,

(c) that gift or those gifts meet”

(3) In sub-paragraph (2),

(a) after “to” insert “(a)”;

(b) delete “(a)” (where it occurs for the second time) and insert “(i)”;

(c) delete “(b)” and insert “(ii)”; and

(d) after “the case may be” delete the full stop and insert—

“;

(b) any support (of any kind) provided by the services of a volunteer which are provided in that volunteer’s own time and free of charge; or

(c) a donation (of any kind) which is intended by the donor to be used for the purpose of meeting

(i) any campaign expenditure incurred in connection with the member’s campaign for election to a party office;

(ii) the election expenses of the member in relation to the election at which that member was returned as a member of the Scottish Parliament; or

(iii) the election expenses of the member in relation to any UK parliamentary election at which that member stands as a candidate,

but this exemption ceases to apply if the donation is not used for its intended purpose by the expiry of the 35th day after the election result is declared.”

(4) In sub-paragraph (3),

(a) delete “sub-paragraph (1)” and insert “this paragraph—

“candidate” has the same meaning as in section 118A, as read with section 90ZA(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983;¹

“campaign expenditure” includes expenditure incurred, whether before or after the member’s candidacy for election to the party office is announced or after the date on which the result of that election is declared, which can reasonably be

described as being for the purposes of that campaign;”

and

(b) in the end of the definition of “controlling interest” delete the fullstop and insert—

“;

“current parliamentary session” means the parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned;

“election expenses”, in relation to a member, has the same meaning for the purposes of

(i) sub-paragraph (2)(c) (ii) as “election expenses” has in relation to a candidate in the order under section 12 of the 1998 Act which is in force for the purposes of the election at which the member was returned; and

(ii) sub-paragraph (2)(c)(iii) as “election expenses” has in section 90ZA of the Representation of the People Act 1983;²

“party office” means an office in a registered political party with which that member is connected;

“registered political party” means a political party registered under Part II of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000⁶ and a member is “connected with” a registered political party if the member was returned at the election after contesting it as a candidate (whether for return as a constituency member or as a regional member) of that party; and

“specified limit” means 1% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

Heritable Property

4 (1) Paragraph 8 (Heritable property) of the Schedule is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (2)(a), delete the words “50 per cent of a member’s salary on that date (rounded down to the nearest £10)” and insert “the specified limit”.

(3) Delete sub-paragraph (2)(b) and insert—

“(b) any income is received from the heritable property during the twelve months prior to the relevant date.”

(4) In sub-paragraph (3)(a), delete “his or her own” and insert “the member’s”.

(5) After sub-paragraph (7) insert—

“(8) In this paragraph—

“current parliamentary session” means the

parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned; and

“specified limit” means 50% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

Interest in shares

5 (1) Paragraph 9 (Interest in shares) of the Schedule is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (2)(b), delete the words “50 per cent of a member’s salary on that date (rounded down to the nearest £10)” and insert “the specified limit”.

(3) In sub-paragraph (3), delete “apply”.

(4) In sub-paragraph (3)(a), delete “his or her own name” and insert “the name of the member (or relevant person)”.

(5) In sub-paragraph (8),

(a) insert after “paragraph”—

““current parliamentary session” means the parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned;”

(b) delete the words “(a)” and “and (b)”;

(c) at the end of that sub-paragraph, delete the full stop and insert— “;

“specified limit” means 50% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

¹ 1983 c 1

² 1983 c. 1

That the Parliament, in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 4(1) and 4(2) of the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (asp 12)—

- makes the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (Form and Content of Written Statement) Determination 2011 as set out in Annexe E of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 9th Report 2010 (Session 3), *MSPs’ Registrable Interests: Proposed Changes to the Code of Conduct* with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed;
- revokes the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (Form and Content of Written Statement) Determination 2007 with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed; and
- revokes the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (Gross Income from Heritable Property) Determination 2007 with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed.

That the Parliament agrees to amend the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament by replacing Volumes 1 and 2 with Volumes 1 and 2 as set out in Annexe D of the Standards, Procedures and Public

Appointments Committee's 9th Report 2010 (Session 3), MSPs' Registrable Interests: Proposed Changes to the Code of Conduct, with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed.

16:33

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

My contribution to the debate will be brief and fairly general.

We have heard from the committee convener the detail of why we thought it appropriate to carry out an inquiry to look at the schedule to the 2006 act, which defines the categories of registrable interest, and section 2 of the code of conduct, which gives further guidance on what interests require to be registered, and then to suggest changes to them that would come into force at the start of the next parliamentary session in May.

I, too, pay tribute to the committee clerks and the legal team, who put so much effort into the very detailed work that was required in reviewing the schedule and formulating the proposed amendments to it and the necessary changes to the code of conduct that arise from those amendments.

It took a lot of detailed consideration and discussion to arrive at the amendments that are now before the Parliament. I hope that members will agree that the committee has managed to achieve the intended clarity and simplification of the register of members' interests as outlined in the principles that guided the committee's deliberations—notably, that the register should capture significant financial interests; that it should be as straightforward and simple as possible for members to comply with the register's requirements; and that the proposed changes should be in the public interest and ensure that transparency and accountability are maintained. We hope that that will be achieved by reducing the number of interest categories in the schedule from eight to five and by amending the remaining categories, as outlined by Gil Paterson.

The only category that I will discuss at length is remuneration. It is in the public interest that significant financial interests that could influence or be perceived to influence a member's views or actions should be registered, but if many interests that are so trivial that they are unlikely to create the appearance of prejudice are recorded, no useful purpose is served. The definition of remuneration that is in use also makes registrable some interests that most people who read them would not look on as remuneration.

The committee felt that it was important that the code of conduct made clear as far as possible what is and is not registrable. An example that vexed most members, including me, was

participation by members in opinion surveys by organisations that make a small payment for that participation directly to a charity that members nominate. The legal advice is that, because a member can direct where such a donation is paid, it falls within the definition of remuneration and should be registered. I will not go into other such examples, but I think that the proposed changes to the remuneration category will help members to decide when they need to make an entry in the register of interests.

If the registrable threshold for gifts, heritable property and shares is fixed at the start of the parliamentary session rather than being raised whenever members receive a salary increase, as has happened until now, that will make it more straightforward for members in the next parliamentary session to register those items.

I have only skimmed the surface of the proposed changes to the schedule and the code of conduct, but I hope that the Parliament will appreciate the committee's efforts in reaching our conclusions and will see the merit in what is proposed. I hope that the motion on the schedule and all the other committee motions that are being debated will be agreed to at decision time.

16:36

Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD): I am pleased to have the opportunity to mark my nearly 24-hour anniversary as a member of the committee with a speech in the debate. Although I am a newcomer to the committee, it is obvious to me that the clerks, the Scottish Parliament information centre and other committee staff have worked hard and diligently to prepare the reports. I thank them for their work, the respondents for their contributions to the consultation and my fellow committee members for their efforts.

No procedures, regulations or code can be perfect, which is why it is only proper that we keep the code by which all of us abide under regular review. Many of the changes are just general housekeeping of the schedule to the 2006 act, and one or two proposals are being made to tighten provisions and clarify points of confusion.

I welcome the publication of the committee's report and the opportunity to debate it. I will cover just a few points. One privilege of an MSP's job is giving school pupils or students who take a keen interest in politics the chance to experience work in a parliamentary office. As the consultation document noted, the definition of gifts in the 2006 act does not exempt the value of the time of volunteers who work in parliamentary and constituency offices. As the report states, some members might not register volunteer support under gifts, because of the exemption under the

sponsorship category. It is desirable to clarify that situation, so I am glad that a revision to the schedule is proposed.

As Nanette Milne said, letters often come our way from the likes of Ipsos MORI and ComRes asking us to participate in quite large surveys, for which the pay-off is that we can direct the polling organisations to make donations to local charitable causes. Like most members, I have done such surveys and asked for donations to be made to the likes of the Royal Air Forces Association and common good funds. As arrangements stand, a fee that is paid to a charity in return for completing a survey is still classed as remuneration, although members have no personal benefit.

I agree with the committee's view that the registration of interests, particularly in relation to remuneration, is intended to focus on significant interests that might be perceived to influence a member's behaviour. That is without question in the public interest. I also agree with the committee that it is difficult to state that a member could be unduly influenced by directing a small donation to a charity for completing a survey. I question whether constituents really care whether I have participated in a survey and asked that a donation be paid to a local charity. That is why I welcome the proposed changes to focus the remuneration category on relevant and non-trivial interests.

As I mentioned, many of the proposals are just general housekeeping of the schedule. We see that in the restructuring of the number of categories in the schedule from eight to five. As I highlighted, the amended definitions to categories such as remuneration and gifts are welcome, so I am happy to lend my support to the implementation of the proposed changes.

16:40

Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I, too, will make some brief remarks—with an emphasis on the word “brief”—on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's ninth report, which proposes changes to the code of conduct and the schedule to the 2006 act. The changes are set out in today's *Business Bulletin* and have been outlined clearly by the convener, with emphases added by Nanette Milne and Jim Hume.

It is obviously vital that we have a code of conduct and a regime for declaring interests that command the respect of the public at large. That requires the scheme to be transparent and, as the convener indicated, to capture significant financial interests. It is the basis for maintaining the highest of standards among members, and therefore the trust of the people, and it is the basis of the accountability of members in these matters.

It is also important in aiding transparency and accountability that the scheme that is produced should be in the simplest form possible. That aids public understanding of what is required of us as individual members and of the scheme as a whole. It is also important for members that the scheme is set out in as straightforward a way as possible, so that we do not make errors as a result of any complexity. In that context, it is important to keep reviewing how the scheme is working in practice in light of previous changes. As other members said, the report reflects the outcome of the review process. We should not be frightened of changing what we have established in the past if, on the basis of experience, we deem it not to be working in the interests of the characteristics that are required of the scheme.

As the convener, Nanette Milne and Jim Hume have said, the report sets out a range of small but nonetheless significant changes to the regime. Like Nanette Milne and Jim Hume, I am pleased that we are removing the rather silly anomaly whereby members who filled out a questionnaire or survey—sometimes taking a considerable time to do so—in order to give a donation to a charity had to declare the resulting donation as if it were remuneration, even though they never saw the money and it was directed to a charity. I am pleased that that anomaly is going and that the situation has been clarified. The matter has been a considerable irritation to members down the years.

Jim Hume properly mentioned another anomaly: volunteering. If someone gave their time freely to support a cause that they thought important and to make a contribution to the community and they did so by volunteering through the political process, the member had to declare that as if it were a gift. If someone gives their time as part of their employment and it is sponsored in some way, I agree that that should be declared. However, if they give their time in the strong tradition of volunteering that we want to encourage in the Parliament, it is wrong that that has to be declared, so I am glad that that anomaly is being tidied up.

We are also ending the double registration of election expenses, which is unnecessary as such expenses are covered by a separate piece of legislation. Why should we be required to register election expenses twice, which surely only helps to confuse the public? Members have to report to the Electoral Commission under a separate law on the matter. The public will rightly be referred from the Parliament website to the website of the Electoral Commission and, in that way, will get a complete picture of members' interests.

The report also refers to the Scotland Bill and the further changes to the regime that it will introduce. That bill is being scrutinised and

deliberated on elsewhere, but the pattern of change has been approved by the Parliament.

This is a balanced and sensible package of refinements to the scheme. As the convener rightly said, the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner, who is the guardian of the public interest in these matters, is happy with the changes. I am happy to support them and I hope that the Parliament will do so at 5 o'clock.

16:44

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): As deputy convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I am pleased to contribute to this afternoon's debate. I echo the convener's endorsement of the committee's proposals. The recommendations will ensure both that there is a simplified system and that the transparency and accountability to which Peter Peacock alluded is maintained, which is important.

As we have heard, there will now be five categories of registrable interests instead of eight. Hopefully, that will eliminate overlap; it will certainly reduce it. The changes will make the system more user friendly for members and will make clearer what they have to register and where. That is all the more crucial, as new members will enter the Parliament following the election in May.

The point of the register is to register significant financial interests that are likely to influence, or are likely to be perceived as influencing, a member in carrying out their role as an MSP. The changes ensure that the register of interests is clearly focused on interests that need to meet that test, not on a host of minor interests that are not realistically likely to be seen as influencing a member's behaviour.

The committee kept the principles that underpin the registration process in mind throughout the inquiry. It spent a lot of time deliberating on where, for example, exemptions from registration were and were not appropriate, and on considering what the appropriate financial thresholds for registration in different categories should be.

As Peter Peacock, the convener and others have mentioned, having two different regimes for registering election expenses is confusing and unclear to members and everyone else. The requirements for registering political donations and election expenses have been set by the UK Parliament, taking account of the public interest. The Electoral Commission and returning officers have responsibility for managing the system, so it makes sense that they should also be responsible for publishing that information.

We do not expect the changes to lead to a reduction in the number of interests that are registered. However, the new categories will clarify and simplify matters so that a particular interest can be registered in only one category, regardless of the individual circumstances. Like the convener, I thank the Scottish Parliamentary Standards Commissioner for his valuable advice and input to the committee's work. I also thank the committee clerks, who have provided invaluable support not just in this area but throughout my time as deputy convener; our legal team; the convener, for the work that he has done; and my committee colleagues.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee may not appear to be the most interesting of committees, but it is to us. The committee plays a crucial role in ensuring that the standards of the Parliament are maintained and that procedures are kept up to date and reflect changes. I thank all those who have helped us.

I support the motions in the convener's name.

“Minor changes to Standing Orders”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-7734, in the name of Gil Paterson, on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s report, “Minor changes to Standing Orders”.

16:48

Gil Paterson (West of Scotland) (SNP): The previous debate highlights how I feel about the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee—there is a good sense of harmony, and members work hard together. It has been a pleasure to convene the committee; I do not say that lightly.

The purpose of this debate is to seek the Parliament’s agreement to some minor rule changes that the committee is recommending. The changes that the committee proposes are to clarify existing procedures, to make changes as a consequence of legislation to which the Parliament has agreed and to bring standing orders up to date with current drafting practices.

The first proposed amendment relates to hybrid bills. Although such bills are a form of public bill, chapter 9C of standing orders provides a set of rules for hybrid bills that are separate from the rules for public bills in chapter 9. To clarify the relationship between the rules in those two chapters, the committee recommends an amendment to rule 9.1, to provide that, where the rules on hybrid bills in chapter 9C apply in relation to a bill, those rules supersede the rules on public bills in chapter 9.

The second change that is recommended in the committee’s report is to clarify an anomaly in standing orders. Rule 13.7.11 currently allows the Presiding Officer discretion to decide whether to call a question if the member who lodged it is not in the chamber. However, rule 13.7.4 does not allow that question to be taken if the member is not in the chamber. The committee proposes to rectify that anomaly by removing the discretionary power of the Presiding Officer, so as to make it quite clear that a question can be called only if the member who lodged the question is present.

The Scottish Parliamentary Commissions and Commissioners etc Act 2010 made a number of changes to the composition and titles of the bodies that are supported by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. The committee is proposing amendments to standing orders to reflect the 2010 act, mainly in relation to the new titles of Public

Standards Commissioner for Scotland and Public Appointments Commissioner for Scotland.

A further new provision is proposed to reflect that members of the Standards Commission for Scotland will be appointed by the SPCB rather than by Scottish ministers.

The final change that the committee recommends is to update standing orders to meet current best practice in drafting by replacing terms such as “he or she” with gender-neutral alternatives. Let me explain that. Although using “he or she” is clearly preferable to the previous practice of using “he” to mean both sexes, it has been considered that, as “he” always precedes “she”, there is still a gender bias. The committee is therefore proposing that standing orders should adopt the same recommended practice as is followed in legislation.

On behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 10th Report 2010 (Session 3), *Minor changes to Standing Orders* (SP Paper 552), and agrees that changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 1 April 2011.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As no other member has asked to speak, that concludes the debate on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s report, “Minor changes to Standing Orders”.

16:52

Meeting suspended.

17:00

On resuming—

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):

There are 14 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on protecting public services, if the amendment in the name of John Swinney is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Michael McMahon falls, and that, if the amendment in the name of Derek Brownlee is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jeremy Purvis falls.

The first question is, that amendment S3M-7735.2, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7735, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on protecting public services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (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)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 43, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S3M-7735.4, in the name of Michael McMahon, is pre-empted.

The next question is, that amendment S3M-7735.3, in the name of Derek Brownlee, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7735, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on protecting public services, 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)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 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)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7735.1, in the name of Jeremy Purvis, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7735, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on protecting public services, 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)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (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)
 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)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 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)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 86, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7735, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on protecting public services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 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)

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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (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)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 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)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 74, Against 43, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament calls on all parties in the Parliament to work together to deliver a balanced budget that will

safeguard services and strengthen economic growth for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7737.1, in the name of Jim Mather, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7737, in the name of Robin Harper, on opportunities for young people, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S3M-7737.2, in the name of David Whitton, which seeks to amend motion S3M-7737, in the name of Robin Harper, on opportunities for young people, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S3M-7737, in the name of Robin Harper, on opportunities for young people, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Accordingly, the Parliament resolved—That the Parliament commends the work of Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus in founding, in 1976, the Grameen Bank, which provides microfinance for people living in poverty in Bangladesh; recognises that, since its beginnings in Bangladesh, there are now Grameen-type programmes tackling poverty across 38 countries around the world and that Grameen America is now branching out to many new locations in New York, Nebraska, Washington DC and California; believes that there is an opportunity to tackle the growing problem of unemployment among 16 to 19-year-olds with the establishment of a microcredit scheme for young people in Scotland; notes that this scheme could offer loans for small business ventures to young people who are not in education, employment or training and be supported by an entrepreneurial mentoring scheme; further believes that such a scheme would build on the contribution made by Scotland's social enterprise sector and draw on Scotland's long history of entrepreneurial achievement, and calls on the Scottish Government to explore ways to establish a Scottish youth microcredit scheme building on the excellent work by the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust in providing microfinance for business start-ups to 18 to 25-year-olds, the work of Glasgow Caledonian University in establishing a partnership with the Grameen Bank to develop the Grameen Caledonian Creative Lab and a Grameen Bank in Scotland and other organisations making a proactive effort and their own contributions in common cause by discussing this idea with the Scottish League of Credit Unions and the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7710, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7733, in the name of Gil Paterson, on "The Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and other subordinate

legislation Standing Order rule changes", be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 3rd Report 2010 (Session 3), *The Interpretation and Legislative Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and other subordinate legislation Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 465), and agrees that changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 6 April 2011.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7724, in the name of Gil Paterson, on the schedule to the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament, considering that it is expedient to make certain modifications to the Schedule to the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (asp 12), in exercise of the powers conferred by paragraph 10(1) of that Schedule—

- makes the modifications to that Schedule that are contained in the Annexe to this resolution; and
- provides that those modifications shall come into force on the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed.

ANNEXE

MODIFICATIONS TO THE SCHEDULE TO THE INTERESTS OF MEMBERS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ACT 2006

Remuneration

- 1 (1) In the heading to paragraph 2 (Remuneration) of the Schedule, after "Remuneration" insert "and Related undertaking".
- (2) Paragraph 2 is amended as follows.
- (3) At the beginning of that paragraph, insert—

“(A1) Where the circumstances are as described in sub-paragraph (1) or (1A).”
- (4) In sub-paragraph (1)(f), delete the words “or any other work”.
- (5) After sub-paragraph (1), insert

“(1A) Where a member is, or was—

 - (a) a director in a related undertaking; or
 - (b) a partner in a firm,

but does, or did, not receive remuneration by virtue of being such a director or partner.”
- (6) In sub-paragraph (2), insert after “corporation” the words “or of Convener, deputy Convener or member of a Committee of the Parliament”.
- (7) After sub-paragraph (2), insert—

“(3) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply where the remuneration received from a person on a single, or on more than one, occasion during the current parliamentary

session consists solely of expenses unless those expenses amount, or amount in aggregate, to more than the specified limit.

(4) The exception in sub-paragraph (3) applies even although the remuneration received from that person on another occasion, or on other occasions, during that session does not consist solely of expenses.

(5) In this paragraph—

“current parliamentary session” means the parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned;

“a related undertaking” is a parent or subsidiary undertaking of an undertaking of which the member is a director and receives remuneration as a director as mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(d); and

“specified limit” means 1% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

Related undertaking, Election Expenses and Sponsorship

2 Paragraphs 3 (Related Undertaking), 4 (Election expenses) and 5 (Sponsorship) of the Schedule are deleted.

Gifts

3 (1) Paragraph 6 (Gifts) of the Schedule is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1), delete sub-paragraph (a) and the words “(b) that gift meets” and insert—

“(a) in the case where the gift was received from a person on a single occasion, the value of that gift, at the date on which it was received, exceeds the specified limit; or

(b) in the case where gifts were received from that person on more than one occasion during the current parliamentary session, the aggregate value of those gifts, at the dates on which they were received, exceeds the specified limit and, in either case,

(c) that gift or those gifts meet”

(3) In sub-paragraph (2),

(a) after “to” insert “(a)”;

(b) delete “(a)” (where it occurs for the second time) and insert “(i)”;

(c) delete “(b)” and insert “(ii)”; and

(d) after “the case may be” delete the full stop and insert—

“,

(b) any support (of any kind) provided by the services of a volunteer which are provided in that volunteer’s own time and free of charge; or

(c) a donation (of any kind) which is intended by the donor to be used for

the purpose of meeting

(i) any campaign expenditure incurred in connection with the member’s campaign for election to a party office;

(ii) the election expenses of the member in relation to the election at which that member was returned as a member of the Scottish Parliament; or

(iii) the election expenses of the member in relation to any UK parliamentary election at which that member stands as a candidate,

but this exemption ceases to apply if the donation is not used for its intended purpose by the expiry of the 35th day after the election result is declared.”

(4) In sub-paragraph (3),

(a) delete “sub-paragraph (1)” and insert “this paragraph—

“candidate” has the same meaning as in section 118A, as read with section 90ZA(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983;¹

“campaign expenditure” includes expenditure incurred, whether before or after the member’s candidacy for election to the party office is announced or after the date on which the result of that election is declared, which can reasonably be described as being for the purposes of that campaign;”

and

(b) in the end of the definition of “controlling interest” delete the fullstop and insert—

“,

“current parliamentary session” means the parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned;

“election expenses”, in relation to a member, has the same meaning for the purposes of

(i) sub-paragraph (2)(c) (ii) as “election expenses” has in relation to a candidate in the order under section 12 of the 1998 Act which is in force for the purposes of the election at which the member was returned; and

(ii) sub-paragraph (2)(c)(iii) as “election expenses” has in section 90ZA of the Representation of the People Act 1983;²

“party office” means an office in a registered political party with which that member is connected;

“registered political party” means a political party registered under Part II of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000⁶ and a member is “connected with” a registered political party if the member was returned at the election after contesting it as a candidate (whether for return as a constituency member or as a regional member) of that party; and

“specified limit” means 1% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

Heritable Property

4 (1) Paragraph 8 (Heritable property) of the Schedule is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (2)(a), delete the words “50 per cent of a member’s salary on that date (rounded down to the nearest £10)” and insert “the specified limit”.

(3) Delete sub-paragraph (2)(b) and insert—

“(b) any income is received from the heritable property during the twelve months prior to the relevant date.”

(4) In sub-paragraph (3)(a), delete “his or her own” and insert “the member’s”.

(5) After sub-paragraph (7) insert—

“(8) In this paragraph—

“current parliamentary session” means the parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned; and

“specified limit” means 50% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

Interest in shares

5 (1) Paragraph 9 (Interest in shares) of the Schedule is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (2)(b), delete the words “50 per cent of a member’s salary on that date (rounded down to the nearest £10)” and insert “the specified limit”.

(3) In sub-paragraph (3), delete “apply”.

(4) In sub-paragraph (3)(a), delete “his or her own name” and insert “the name of the member (or relevant person)”.

(5) In sub-paragraph (8),

(a) insert after “paragraph”—

““current parliamentary session” means the parliamentary session which begins immediately after, or in which, the member is returned;”

(b) delete the words “(a)” and “and (b)”; and

(c) at the end of that sub-paragraph, delete the full stop and insert— “ ;

“specified limit” means 50% of a member’s salary (rounded down to the nearest £10) at the beginning of the current parliamentary session.”

¹ 1983 c 1

² 1983 c. 1

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7725, in the name of Gil Paterson, on determinations to the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 4(1) and 4(2) of the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (asp 12)—

- makes the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (Form and Content of Written Statement) Determination 2011 as set out in Annexe E of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 9th Report 2010 (Session 3), *MSPs’ Registrable Interests: Proposed Changes to the Code of Conduct* with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed;
- revokes the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (Form and Content of Written Statement) Determination 2007 with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed; and
- revokes the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 (Gross Income from Heritable Property) Determination 2007 with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7726, in the name of Gil Paterson, on the code of conduct for members of the Scottish Parliament, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to amend the Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament by replacing Volumes 1 and 2 with Volumes 1 and 2 as set out in Annexe D of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 9th Report 2010 (Session 3), *MSPs’ Registrable Interests: Proposed Changes to the Code of Conduct*, with effect from the date after the date of the first dissolution of the Parliament following the date on which this resolution is passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S3M-7734, in the name of Gil Paterson, on minor changes to standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 10th Report 2010 (Session 3), *Minor changes to Standing Orders* (SP Paper 552), and agrees that changes to Standing Orders set out

in Annexe A to the report be made with effect from 1 April 2011.

A9 Dualling (Timetable)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-7532, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on the dual the A9 timetable.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that the A9 trunk road has the highest fatality rate of any road in Scotland and that the majority of accidents occur on single carriageway stretches; sadly notes that 2010 had seen 11 deaths on the Perth to Inverness section by 1 December; acknowledges that the A9 between these points continually switches between single and dual carriageway, which, it considers, can cause driver confusion and lead to accidents; believes that upgrading the A9 between Perth and Inverness to dual carriageway in its entirety would reduce the accident and fatality rates and in addition would help ease congestion and bring an economic boost to Mid Scotland and Fife and the Highlands, and accordingly would welcome a full and detailed timetable for such improvements.

17:07

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank all the members who signed my motion on a timetable for dualling the A9 and those who have attended the debate.

I am just about old enough to remember, from growing up as a child in Inverness, what we now know as the old A9, which meandered its way from Perth northwards through countless small communities. It was unsuitable to serve the Highland population and was often subject to congestion and long delays. In 1974, the then Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland, Gordon Campbell, signed the orders for the creation of what was then known as the new A9. The road was constructed over the following 12 years. It bypassed towns such as Dunkeld and Newtonmore, relieving them of traffic congestion, and was a mix of single carriageway and dualled sections. At the time, it was built to the highest design standards and with the latest engineering technology. It was a massive commitment and investment in Perthshire and the Highlands.

Now, more than 30 years after the completion of the road, traffic levels are, in places, five times what they were back then in the late 1970s. A road that was adequate in the 1970s and 1980s is no longer sufficient to cope with the level of traffic and the number of heavy goods vehicles that use it today.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): As a fellow Invernessian, I recognise Mr Fraser's description of the road's construction. I agree with his points about construction being important, but does he share my view that driver training, particularly among young drivers, is crucial? Will

he support my campaign to have a graduated driving licence to ensure that young drivers get more training and therefore have fewer accidents on the roads, particularly the A9?

Murdo Fraser: I am happy to support the general thrust of Mr Stewart's comments, although I would have to look at the details of his proposal about the driving licence. Generally speaking, more driver education would be extremely helpful.

Through Transport Scotland publications and parliamentary answers, we know that the A9 is officially Scotland's deadliest road, with the highest fatality rate of any road in Scotland. It witnesses on average more than 200 accidents per year and had the highest or joint-highest death rate of any road in 2004, 2006, 2007 and 2008. We are still to receive the official figures for 2010, but I understand that there were 14 fatalities in that year, with 13 lives lost on the Perth to Inverness stretch. Sadly, I am sure that that will again mean that the A9 has one of the highest numbers of fatal accidents on roads in Scotland for that year—if not the highest.

No one here can ignore those facts. We must remember that, behind the statistics, there are many families and friends who have lost loved ones and many communities that have been devastated. Every accident is a human tragedy, and tonight we are joined in the gallery by some of those who have lost loved ones on the A9.

As my motion sets out, between Perth and Inverness there are long and dangerous stretches of single carriageway and the road continually switches between single and dual carriageway sections. The long stretches of single carriageway cause driver frustration and the road's switching between single and dual carriageway causes driver confusion. If the A9 were dualled in its entirety, those problems would be substantially removed. I fully accept that dualling the A9 would not end accidents on the road, but I strongly believe—my belief is shared by road-safety campaigners and the police—that upgrading it would substantially reduce the number of accidents.

I welcome the commitment that the Scottish Government made in its strategic transport projects review to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness, but my concern about that commitment is that the A9 project is in competition with 28 others, and people who wish to see improvements on the road have no idea where they sit in the Government's list of priorities and no idea what the likely timescale for completion might be. That is why I hope that the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure will give an indication of when road works to improve the A9 will commence and how they will progress. I would like him to tell us that tonight, or to confirm that a statement to

Parliament will be made, in which a full timetable for the dualling of the A9 will be set out, similar to the timetable for the new Forth road bridge crossing, with details of when it will start, the likely costs and the likely completion time.

I understand that dualling the A9 is a massive financial commitment, and I recognise that finances are under severe pressure and that most of the Scottish Government's capital budget for the next few years will be swallowed up by the new Forth crossing. However, it is for the Government to set out its priorities and to tell us where the A9 stands in relation to other projects. We should not forget that there is a substantial cost to not acting. I am talking not just about the appalling human cost that I have mentioned, but about the economic cost of disruption.

The most recent fatal accident on the A9 between Perth and Inverness was on 23 December, when three lorries crashed north of Dunkeld. Understandably, the road was closed all day. The closure of Scotland's main arterial route between the central belt and the north of Scotland for a whole day, two days before Christmas, inevitably caused major disruption for individuals and businesses, and had a massive economic impact.

We are now seeing money being spent on the creation of two-plus-one overtaking lanes on the A9. Although any improvements are welcome, I wonder whether the money would not be better spent on the creation of dual carriageways, because if the Government is serious about its commitment to dualling the road in the long term, those lanes will have to be replaced. It is ironic that the new overtaking lane at Moy had to be closed just two weeks after it was opened, because it turned out that it was more dangerous than the single carriageway that it replaced.

On the issue of cost, I was disappointed to hear the minister, Keith Brown, when he was interviewed this morning, repeat the old canard that the Edinburgh trams money could have been spent on the A9. Unfortunately for him, I have a long memory and I remember—I have all the evidence to back this up—that at the time of the vote in Parliament on the trams in 2007, the Scottish Government made it quite clear that if the trams project did not proceed, that money could be spent only on other public transport projects and not on the A9. I understand the game of politics and the minister's need to shift blame away from his Government's broken promises, but he is engaged in a pretty shameless attempt to rewrite history. To be frank, I expected better of him.

In closing, I would like to thank the newspapers *The Courier* and *The Press and Journal* and local papers such as the *Perthshire Advertiser* and the

Inverness Courier, which have all done so much to highlight the need to dual the A9. I would also like to put on record my thanks to all the people who have supported the campaign to dual the road, especially those who have gone through the ordeal of losing loved ones on it, for whom I have the greatest respect and admiration. If any good is to come out of the succession of tragedies on the A9, I hope that it is a full and detailed timetable for its dualling, set in stone.

17:14

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing this important debate. I welcome the opportunity to talk about the A9 and the key role that it plays in connecting the Highlands to the central belt, which has received more than its fair share of investment in transport infrastructure, unlike the Highlands. Sadly, the north of Scotland did not get the investment that it deserved until the Scottish National Party came to power. The SNP Government's swift action to include the dualling of the A9 in its first strategic transport projects review is to be commended. In his winding up, I hope that the minister will give us some indication of when we will get a timetable for the first phase of this essential infrastructure project.

I am sure that Mr Fraser's motives for bringing the motion to Parliament are honourable, although he has missed no opportunity to attack the Scottish Government in the past for failing to convert the route to dual carriageway immediately it took power in 2007 as the first minority Administration. However, I was happy to add my support to his motion, thereby ensuring that it had the cross-party support that it needs for such an important matter to be debated in the chamber.

I wish that Mr Fraser's concern for the transport needs of Perthshire and the Highlands had been paramount when he joined Labour and the Liberal Democrats to obediently vote along party lines and defeat the minority Scottish Government in its early days, thus forcing it to allocate £500 million from Scotland's small budget to Edinburgh's increasingly problematic trams project. Whatever Murdo Fraser says about only being able to use the money for other public transport projects, £500 million was taken out of the budget. As Murdo Fraser knows, budgets are variable and can be used in different ways.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member take an intervention?

Dave Thompson: I will let Murdo Fraser in in a minute.

For those members who acted so cynically in forcing such a sizeable proportion of the country's budget to be spent in the central belt and

Edinburgh to return to the chamber to ask why multimillion pound work has not begun in the Highlands and Perthshire is the height of hypocrisy. Surely they cannot expect their complaints to attract any credibility whatever.

Murdo Fraser cannot even argue that he did not know what he was doing back then. David McLetchie, his leader at the time, let the truth out to the *Edinburgh Evening News* in an unguarded moment in November 2007, when he said

"Had they cancelled the trams, they were never going to spend that money in Edinburgh. They were intending to spend the money on transport projects elsewhere in Scotland."

I hope that Murdo Fraser is suitably embarrassed, but he should not just have a red face on this issue; he must apologise to the people of the Highlands and Perthshire for siphoning off cash that could have contributed to improving the A9. I will even take an intervention from him now to allow him to give that apology.

Murdo Fraser: I regret the tone of Mr Thompson's contribution to this serious debate. It was quite clear in 2007 that the SNP meant that the trams money could be spent only on public transport projects. I also found a campaign leaflet from the Glasgow North East by-election in 2009 in which the SNP said that the Edinburgh trams money should have been spent in Glasgow. So, it was Edinburgh or Glasgow—not the Highlands.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Thompson, I remind you and the other members to keep an eye on the motion.

Dave Thompson: It is a motion on the A9 and I will certainly do that. If £500 million is taken out of the Scottish budget, irrespective of what Mr Fraser says, it means £500 million in the overall budget that could be spent elsewhere. People in Glasgow would have been quite entitled to have asked for the money to be spent there. I wanted it to be spent in the Highlands. Fergus Ewing also argued that case strongly. Murdo Fraser voted for it to be spent in Edinburgh: that is the fact of the matter.

To make matters worse for the north of Scotland, the underinvestment by the previous Tory and Labour-Liberal Governments also affected the other two arterial routes into the Highlands: the A82 and the A96. I am, however, pleased to say that both routes have also been given a commitment for improvement from the SNP Government, under the STPR. I am particularly pleased that that commitment includes the A82 route action plan.

In the meantime, the Scottish Government has not sat on its hands. It has expedited the improvement programme that is set out in the current STPR. It has already spent £50 million on the A9, fast-tracking the Crubenmore dual

carriageway extension. It is also progressing improvements on the A82 at Crianlarich and Pulpit Rock. The SNP Government is the first to commit to those essential infrastructure developments, after years of inaction from the Tories, Labour and the Liberals, so we need no lessons from Murdo Fraser or anyone else in the Opposition on looking after the needs of the Highlands.

17:19

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

There have been several debates on the A9 in the three sessions of this Parliament, including two that were secured by John Swinney—in November 2002 and September 2005. It is interesting to look back at the wording, passion and commitment in the debates of Opposition politicians who now hold the reins of Government and have been in the position to fulfil their campaign pledges since May 2007:

“I am one of those who has campaigned and will continue to campaign for the full dualling of the A9 to Inverness. Does the minister accept the case in principle? If so, when will it be delivered? Can he specify the year, decade, century or millennium?”—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2004; c 10056.]

That was Fergus Ewing. We now know that the Scottish Government accepts the case to dual the A9 in principle, but the question today is on the timetable, just as it was then.

In November 2002, John Swinney said:

“I shall argue for the reconstruction of the A9 as a dual carriageway ... I ask the minister not to commit himself to immediate action to dual the A9, but to give a commitment to examine the case for doing so and to consider including the measure in the Government's programme in the short, medium and long term.”—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2002; c 15574-5, 15777.]

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: If Mr Swinney will let me finish, I have even more about him—he can make an even better response.

In September 2005, Mr Swinney's comments were even stronger:

“What I want the Government to do is to get on with delivering its commitments to the people in my constituency, which is something that it has lamentably failed to do so far.”

He continued by asking the minister to

“tell Parliament why there has been such an abject failure to deliver on the promises made to my constituents by several Scottish Executive ministers.”—[*Official Report*, 21 September 2005; c 19312, 19314.]

He also sought an assurance of the timescale over 10 or 15 years.

John Swinney: Is not the fundamental difference between now and all of the comments that Mary Scanlon has recounted and the complaints that were made then that the Administration at that time had absolutely no commitment to dualling the A9? This Government was elected with a commitment to dual the A9, and we are now taking steps to do that. Any reasonable person would understand that a road cannot be dualled in the timescale that we have had at our disposal. What we have done is invest in improving the A9 and delivering more dual carriageway and safer junctions.

Mary Scanlon: Being a reasonable person, I have already acknowledged that the Government has accepted in principle to dual the A9, but tonight we are looking to hold it to account and for ministers to produce the timetable that Mr Swinney sought so many years ago.

In 2005, the now Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism Jim Mather stated:

“To deny the Highlands the chance to see the A9 dualled is to limit their potential to converge economically with the rest of Scotland and the United Kingdom.”—[*Official Report*, 21 September 2005; c 19322.]

It is on the basis of the promises and commitments in opposition that today we hold the Government to account. When we move the debate on to November 2007, the then Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change gave an assurance of the Government's commitment to dual the A9, but there is still no timescale.

The motion mentions 11 deaths on the Perth to Inverness section of the A9 but, with respect, I do not think that the headline figure reflects the full horror of accidents on the road—I know that local members will acknowledge that. I have met people who have been involved in crashes on the A9 who never walked again and never worked from the day of their accident. We should not forget the full toll of the accidents by looking only at the fatalities.

The A9 death rate from Perth to Inverness averages at double figures over the period from 1979 to date. What we are seeking today is a timescale for upgrading the A9 to dual carriageway. It would also be helpful to look at better signage, particularly for drivers who are not familiar with the road. Are more signs needed to notify drivers of upcoming dual carriageway in order to discourage risky overtaking? For those of us who are familiar with the road, the road leading up to sections of dual carriageway is probably where most drivers take risks, overtaking vehicles in order to position themselves to overtake the lorries and slower-moving vehicles in the short dual carriageway sections.

Finally, will the minister explain why taxpayers' money was used to build an overtaking lane at Moy that, as Murdo Fraser said, was considered to be unsafe due to design flaws after only weeks of use? Does the Government not know how to build roads that are fit for purpose?

I thank Murdo Fraser for this debate.

17:24

Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing the debate. I will stick with the traditional tone of members' business debates. I think that a more sombre tone is appropriate in this particular debate; we have sitting in the public gallery bereaved families who have been affected by the A9.

The A9 is one of Scotland's most important transport arteries. As we have already heard from other members, there are many challenges with the road.

David Stewart: The member will be aware that many young and inexperienced drivers use the A9 every day. Does he share my view that we should introduce a graduated driving licence scheme to increase skills and therefore reduce accidents on the A9?

Charlie Gordon: It is an interesting idea. I hope that the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee will look at it soon, within the ambit of one of its inquiries. I take the opportunity to congratulate Mr Stewart on the award that he received last evening in London. The road safety charity Brake named him parliamentarian of the year for his work on road safety.

In some respects, the debate about the A9 and the safety challenges reminds me of the debate some years ago about the A77, or its northern part which is now the M77, because many accidents were attributed to the change in driving conditions. People called the A77 a killer road, and some people call the A9 a killer road. For reasons that I do not have time to go into I am not comfortable with the term "killer road", but I have certainly seen killer drivers, and that is why I believe there is an important role for driver education. However, I would not like to claim that driver behaviour is the dominant factor in the challenges of the A9. I will say a wee bit more about the other challenges in a moment.

It seems obvious that one thing that we have to do with the A9 if at all possible is take some pressure off it. We should see whether we can achieve some modal shift and whether there are options for people not to use the A9 but to use something else. For example, the improvements to the Highland train services might be an

opportunity for some people to take pressure off on the passenger side. On the freight side, at recent meetings of the aforementioned committee with the very long name Mr Swinney has twice told us that he has been hanging around Perth railway station of an evening and that it did his heart good to see freight trains going through and to think that there are fewer lorries trundling up and down the A9 because of that. I make the rather obvious point—it is not a cheap shot—that the same logic should apply to the Highland Spring plant at Blackford and that company's aspiration to shift some of its freight off the A9 and on to the railways. If only we can have a chink of light in relation to the freight facilities grant—but we will have another crack at that debate.

John Swinney: I have noticed a very focused point on the freight facilities grant in the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's report. I assure Mr Gordon that it is attracting considerable attention from ministers just now.

Charlie Gordon: I am grateful for that intervention because it has been given in the spirit in which I proposed what I proposed to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. I am here to help solve problems if I can.

I am running short of time. I want to make the point that, as well as the safety issues, there is the economic case to consider—and it is not just about reducing the opportunity cost to people who are delayed by accidents and congestion on the A9. I look back to the estimable Scott Wilson economic appraisal study of 2007, which was commissioned by the Highlands and Islands transport partnership. I think that there would be value in updating some of that work.

There is a clear need for continuing progress with improving the A9. This evening's debate is the start of yet another period of debate that will, I hope, identify further practical progress.

17:29

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing this evening's members' business debate and, more important, on his role in leading a campaign of more than five years to dual the A9. The fact that 8,500 people have signed the petition to date and that several campaigners and families and friends of those who have been directly affected by accidents on the A9 are present this evening is testament to the strength of feeling on the issue, and rightly so.

As members have pointed out, the A9 is officially Scotland's most dangerous road; it has the highest fatality rate of any road in the country and on average there are more than 200 accidents

on it each year. No one pretends that dualling the A9 will end all accidents, but it is clear that such a move will greatly reduce the number of accidents and save lives. We all know that the major problems with the A9 between Perth and Inverness are the long and dangerous stretches of single carriageway across which it can be very difficult to turn and, as we have all seen for ourselves, that many of the worst accidents occur on stretches where the road continually switches between single and dual carriageway.

The A9 is, by definition, one of Scotland's most important transport links, particularly north of Perth, where it is very difficult to take alternative routes. It must therefore be a priority.

As Charlie Gordon said, it is important to maintain a particular tone in this debate. In that spirit, I suggest to the Scottish National Party that it consider what it said in 2007 about the trams project. At First Minister's question time, there was a debate about the importance of semantics; semantics are certainly important here, because I think that the SNP perhaps gave the wrong impression in 2007 about what trams project money could or could not be used for. That is a matter of public record. The SNP should reflect on that, because I do not think that the transport issues in these two areas can be played off against each other. They are quite separate projects with very different aims and, if we are to believe what the SNP said in 2007, money for them was to come from different funding streams.

As we know, far too many lives have been lost, there have been too many serious injuries and too many families have been affected because of the lack of dualling on the A9. None of us, whether in the Opposition or in the Government, can afford to ignore the statistics and the despair of the affected families. Having the title of Scotland's most dangerous road is frightening and causes communities across Perthshire and the Highland region considerable concern. We all appreciate what has to be done; this evening, let us work together to try to find some answer to this horrible problem.

I warmly welcome Murdo Fraser's debate.

17:32

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I, too, congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing this debate. Perhaps I should declare an interest as one of those who, like John Farquhar Munro and others present in the chamber, use the A9 week after week.

The A9 is crucial to the economy not just of Inverness and Perthshire but areas further north. I do not want to divert the thrust of this evening's debate, because discussing such matters is

worthy and right. Nor do I want to detract from the good investment that is being made in the A9 with, for example, the roadworks that are under way just outside Kingussie. Nor do I want to be a spectre at the feast, but I want to make the plea that, as work between Perth and Inverness proceeds, the other stretch of the A9, to the north of Inverness, should not be left as the poor relation. I make that plea in the knowledge that the bereaved have joined us this evening, but nevertheless I think it is reasonable. After all, there is no doubt that fatalities happen north of Inverness. The A99 south of Wick is one of the most dangerous stretches of all; indeed, I have known too many people who have died on it. The Black Isle lane needs a crawler lane between Tore and the Cromarty bridge; work needs to be carried out at the Tomich junction by Invergordon; and the Cambusavie bends are a deathtrap, particularly in the winter with the terrible black ice. Members have heard me mention the hairpin bend at Berriedale many times, and I have already alluded to the stretch of road between Latheron and Wick.

Last week, I wrote to Keith Brown to say that although I welcome what is happening on the A9 between Inverness and Perth I want an assurance that we will not be treated as the poor relation. The bitter fact that I find so difficult to take is that, notwithstanding the Scottish Government's intentions, no new significant investment has been made in the A9 north of Inverness in the lifetime of this third session of the Scottish Parliament. I acknowledge that the minister's predecessor, Stewart Stevenson, opened phase 2 of the work being undertaken at the Ord of Caithness, but with respect I point out that that was a commitment made by the previous Government.

The A9 is important not only to my constituency. Liam McArthur was with us earlier. The A9 is a vital link to Orkney.

Investment in the A9 to the very far north has always been important, but as Dounreay is being decommissioned and as we are seeing the threat that is being presented to the economy of the far north, the quality of the A9 and investment in it are even more important.

I do not want to take away from what is being done, but my plea to the Government is not to put all the investment south of Inverness. I support what is being done, but the far north should not be starved of investment. My argument is that wherever a person lives and drives, they surely have a right to roads that are of the highest standard and are as safe as possible. With respect, I suggest that we have lost out recently. I have known too many people who have died whom I wish were still with us. I ask that my plea be considered in a thoughtful manner. I look forward to the minister's response.

17:36

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands (Con)): Yesterday, I spoke to one of our well-respected senior citizens, who was on a transport committee when the original dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness was done. He said that the intention at that time was that the road should be totally dualled. We have the wonderful engineering feat of the Kessock bridge, but he pointed out that, sadly, nothing much in the way of improvement has happened since then. More is the pity. The A9 is Scotland's major highway north of the Tay, so why does it not get more attention?

The SNP was committed to dualling the road before it came to office, so it should be committed to doing it now. I am glad to hear it say that it is, but its compromise of three-lane overtaking stretches is confusing and dangerous, and the hills and corners that would have been all right if they were dualled as intended are far too steep for those three-lane experiments. That is why the Moy turn, which Murdo Fraser mentioned, cannot be used by vehicles and pedestrians if they are going north. That was an awful waste of money.

Foreign drivers and tourists who are used to European highways hate the A9. The normal dangers of driving are increased by going from dual carriageway to single carriageway. Jamie Stone made pleas for improvements north of Inverness, as well. I agree with him. The USA's highway systems and how they have opened up outlying areas should be looked at.

On behalf of my Highlands and Islands constituents, I say to the minister that the dualling of the A9 should be completed, please. That will cut half an hour off journeys and cut down on costs for businesses. Above all, it will cut down the number of tragic deaths.

17:38

The Minister for Transport and Infrastructure (Keith Brown): I, too, congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing this debate on an important issue. I appreciate the speeches that members throughout the chamber have made.

The A9 has, arguably, the highest profile of any trunk route in Scotland due to longstanding calls, based on economic and safety arguments, for its dualling. The road is a prominent issue in Scottish public life. It runs 273 miles, or 430km, from Dunblane to Thurso, and is the longest trunk road in Scotland and the fifth longest in the United Kingdom.

The statistics show that accident rates and average speeds on the A9 are broadly comparable with those on other trunk roads, but high-profile incidents in recent years that have involved multiple fatalities have contributed to its stigma. I,

too, acknowledge the people in the gallery who have been bereaved as a result of relatives being involved in fatal accidents over the years.

Safety on the trunk road network is a priority for the Government. We take all accidents seriously and pay particular attention to fatal and serious accidents on our trunk roads. Murdo Fraser mentioned the length of time that the A9 was closed for after an accident. When there are particularly bad accidents, the police have to get in there and take their business very seriously. That underlines what I have just said about having to take fatal accidents, in particular, extremely seriously. We work closely with the police and other agencies to consider the circumstances of every single fatal incident.

I believe that we have the right investment strategy to meet the diverse needs of A9 users where and when they need to be met. The A9 is the longest trunk road in Scotland and it serves many different users, from many remote communities to key strategic traffic between some of our major towns and cities.

I think that we are striking the right balance between investment in safety and investment in local connections for the many communities and businesses that are served by the route, and we are forging ahead with plans for phased dualling of the remaining single carriageway sections between Perth and Inverness. Murdo Fraser mentioned his experiences when he was younger on the original A9. My family is from Brora. When I was young, we used to travel regularly from Edinburgh to Brora. I know that the time that is taken to travel that distance is far better these days and that there is a lot more safety on that route, albeit that there is more traffic.

I have not yet received Jamie Stone's letter, but I will happily look at the issues that he has raised. I point out, however, that when my predecessor came into office in 2007 there were no plans on the books to take forward further improvements on that route at that time so, to that extent, we have started from scratch.

Jamie Stone: I ask that the minister have a look at plans that were prepared during the previous Government's lifetime for improvements at the Berriedale braes. They may not have been brought to his attention, but they do exist.

Keith Brown: I am thinking specifically of plans—I am not sure whether this applies to the plans that the member mentions—that had finance behind them and were put into programmes.

Since 2007, a total of more than £50 million has been invested in the A9, bringing widespread safety and economic benefits to communities and businesses the length of Scotland. We continue to invest, and contractors are currently on site at

Crubenmore investing £10.4 million in a 3.2 kilometre length of dualling.

As has been said, the A9 connects the growing economic centre of Inverness and the north of Scotland with the central belt and the rest of the United Kingdom. Cutting journey times, delivering journey time reliability and improving the route will all lead to future inward investment and benefit Scotland's vital tourism industry.

There is no doubt that the phased dualling of the A9 is a complex and challenging process; it represents one of the biggest infrastructure projects in Scotland's history. Dualling the A9 from Perth to Inverness involves approximately 87 miles of new carriageway and, as Mr Swinney made clear, that requires in-depth planning and design to ensure that we deliver the right scheme, taking into consideration all the factors, including environmental constraints, such as the protected Cairngorms national park. It would clearly never have been possible to design, authorise, procure and complete major dualling of the A9 in the lifetime of this Parliament.

Murdo Fraser talked about priorities. I was involved in a members' business debate last week, as was Charlie Gordon, in which I used the words of Aneurin Bevan, who said that politics is the language of priorities. My priorities and those of the SNP Government are, first, to put the project into the STPR so that it is on the record as one of our priorities. We have committed to dualling the A9, which I do not think any previous Government did. There are the Crubenmore improvements, which I have mentioned, the £50 million investment and the Ballinluig junction, which I have mentioned.

Those are the priorities of the SNP Government. We will compare that, if we can, to the priorities of Murdo Fraser and his party. First, they chose to spend £500 million on trams. I do not accept the idea that the money somehow could never have been used to re-order priorities to assist the A9. They chose to spend £500 million on trams, which the people of Edinburgh did not want.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way on that point?

Keith Brown: No. I want to make a couple of further points.

The Conservative party was in Government for 18 years and did not commit to dualling the A9. The Conservative party, along with its colleagues, the Liberal Democrats, has just cut the Government in Scotland's budget by £1.3 billion. There is £800 million coming out of the capital programme and there will be a 40 per cent cut to the capital programme over the spending review period in Scotland.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: No.

Those are huge constraints on what we can do in Scotland. There is so much more that we could do and so much that we could do more quickly if we did not have to suffer from, for example, votes to spend £500 million in Edinburgh.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the minister for giving way, because I will make an important point. I have here a quotation from May 2007, from Mr Kevin Pringle—whom Mr Brown will know—who is an official spokesman for the First Minister, Alex Salmond. When questioned about what would happen if the Edinburgh trams project did not proceed, he said:

"The government intends all expenditure planned for these projects or any alterations will continue to be used for public transport projects".

Does Mr Brown dissociate himself from Mr Pringle's remarks?

Keith Brown: I repeat the point that I have made, which should have dealt with that point from Murdo Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: Yes or no, Mr Brown?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fraser.

Keith Brown: That £500 million was used by the Conservatives when they voted to have trams in Edinburgh. Their priority was trams in Edinburgh. Our priorities would have been very different—including the A9. I think that to try to use that fig leaf to get out of that is disgraceful. If I can say that, in addition—

Murdo Fraser: Shameless behaviour. He is not fit to be a minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fraser—be careful of your language, please.

Keith Brown: We have made significant and necessary progress. The A9 route strategy identified significant improvements to the road to improve safety and improve the route for strategic and local users. In particular, it identified the problem of platooning traffic leading to driver frustration—a point that Mary Scanlon made—and identified a series of overtaking lanes and dualling sections. That programme of works, which is outlined in the strategy, is nearly complete.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: I am sorry, but I am in my last few seconds.

In 2008, we also announced a commitment to the STPR recommendations to ensure that the A9 will be further improved and rendered fit to serve Scotland's future economic and social needs.

Transport Scotland began the necessary and complex design works for phased dualling between Perth and Inverness, which shows the Government's commitment to the route. Those design works have been undertaken alongside the physical A9 projects that have recently been completed or are progressing.

The completion of the current programme is entirely consistent with beginning the longer-term work on dualling the Perth to Inverness route and the further junction improvements between Dunblane and Perth. Continuing maintenance and safety priorities for the A9 are considered in relation to the requirements of Scotland's trunk road network as a whole. That means that investment follows the greatest need, based on thorough evaluation and opportunities that are identified to maximise the benefit of any investment.

Murdo Fraser said that the Government has to choose. We have chosen to commit to phased dualling of the A9. That has been demonstrated by the work that we have undertaken so far. The commitment that the Conservatives made, instead, was to prioritise trams in Edinburgh. That speaks volumes.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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