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Official Report

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Wednesday 3 October 2012

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 3 October 2012

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Scottish Government Question Time

Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. Question 1, from Neil Findlay, was not lodged, but I have received an explanation for that.

Rail Services (Glasgow, Paisley and Ayr)

2. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what consultation has taken place regarding changes to the timetable for rail services between Paisley Gilmour Street, Ayr and Glasgow Central. (S4O-01337)

The Minister for Transport and Veteran Affairs (Keith Brown): Consultation took place with regional transport partnerships, Passenger Focus and local authorities during May 2012 on the details of changes to rail services between Glasgow Central station and Ayr in December 2012.

Neil Bibby: Will the minister explain why consultation started only after a new timetable had been confirmed? Will he also explain why he continues to insist, as he did in his recent letter in the *Paisley Daily Express*, that there will be no reduction in rail services from Paisley Gilmour Street to Ayr, even though the new timetable halves the off-peak train service between Paisley and Ayr to one per hour? Is the minister trying to mislead the travelling public, or does he fail to understand the scale of the cuts to rail services that he is imposing?

Keith Brown: The timetable had not been agreed in advance of the consultation, and we followed exactly the same process as the Labour and Liberal Democrats followed in previous consultations. The process was carried out by ScotRail and involved the partners whom I mentioned.

I would have thought that Neil Bibby would have taken the opportunity to acknowledge that, with no additional subsidy from the Scottish Government, there will be two additional services between Ayrshire and Glasgow in the morning peak period, which will provide an additional 500 seats. Perhaps he will acknowledge that. There will also be two additional services from Glasgow to Ayrshire in the evening peak period, providing a

similar number of seats. All those services will call at Paisley Gilmour Street.

The new timetable is forecast to generate more than 500,000 additional passenger journeys each year. That is good news for passengers, and I would have thought that Neil Bibby would have taken the opportunity to commend us for that. I understand that, in discussions that he had with officials, he said that he was content with the changes, so I am not sure why he is complaining.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): As the minister will be aware, Paisley Gilmour Street is the fourth busiest train station in Scotland and a major transport hub in my constituency. Will the minister order an evaluation of demand for services at Paisley Gilmour Street?

Keith Brown: In discussions with the member, I have made clear that ScotRail, which has responsibility for the matter, constantly reviews its timetables. There are constraints in the current franchise, which should be acknowledged: if we make changes to the timetable we must pay the franchise holder for that.

We have managed to reach agreement, and ScotRail says that it will carry out additional work to ensure that passengers who use the service have a chance to express their views—I am more than happy to have a further passenger survey, to ensure that that is formalised. Of course, when we have the new franchise—notwithstanding events today—further changes can be made at the time.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): My constituents and I very much welcome the proposed timetable changes for services between Ayr and Glasgow Central, but a minor concern remains that connectivity between Ayrshire and Paisley Gilmour Street, which is the gateway to Glasgow airport, has not improved—as I understand it, the situation is unchanged. Is there flexibility in the system to address that minor concern?

Keith Brown: As I said, the timetable will improve connectivity between Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Glasgow in a number of respects. For example, the current half-hourly Sunday summer service from Glasgow to Ayr, which calls at Paisley Gilmour Street, will become an all-year-round service, which will be an improvement for the member's constituents.

As I said to George Adam and in response to consultation with members, I am more than happy for ScotRail to look at the situation, through the passenger survey, so that it can find out the views of the most important people in all of this: the passengers.

Regeneration (Inverclyde)

3. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to assist the regeneration of Inverclyde. (S4O-01338)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): The Scottish Government is committed to the regeneration of Scotland's most disadvantaged areas and to strengthening local communities, including Inverclyde. Although overall responsibility for local regeneration and economic development rests with Inverclyde Council, we continue to support Riverside Inverclyde urban regeneration company and the council in taking forward their plans for the benefit of the people and communities across the area.

We have already committed to continuing grant funding for the URC, with £2.5 million in 2012-13 and £1.5 million in 2013-14. Thereafter, funding is likely to be available to the URC from a range of sources and my officials are working with the company on revising its business plan and considering potential funding streams to support Inverclyde's on-going regeneration. We have also provided it with accelerated funding of £3.4 million for a number of shovel-ready projects in the area that will improve the environment, improve employability, safeguard existing jobs and create jobs in construction.

Duncan McNeil: Although I thank the minister for her response, I clearly differ with her about the investment in the URC. I see the Cabinet secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities shaking her head, but the evidence is clear.

Nevertheless, I seek not conflict but consensus in how we can be positive and move forward in the area. Next year's cruise season at Clydeport's ocean terminal is set to be a record breaker, with 85,000 passengers coming through Inverclyde as the gateway to Scotland, and I am sure that the minister agrees that Andrew Hemphill, the terminal's general manager, and his team deserve great credit for that. However, visitor numbers could be increased by 20 per cent if berthing capacity at the quayside were extended. Does the minister agree that such a move would provide a significant opportunity not just for Inverclyde but for tourism in Scotland, and will she meet the partners to ensure that that opportunity appears in Inverclyde's business development plan?

Margaret Burgess: The member makes a good point. The cruise industry is expanding, particularly in the Inverclyde area, and I understand that the member has met the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney, and other members to discuss how the matter might be progressed. I also understand that Transport Scotland officials have met

Clydeport to discuss the potential to increase cruise-ship capacity and extend the quayside and I am willing to meet the partners to discuss the issue further.

The Presiding Officer: I call Stuart McMillan for a supplementary. I remind the member that the question is about the regeneration of Inverclyde.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Regeneration takes many forms, one of which is job creation and job sustainability. Given that, will the minister update the chamber on the work of Ferguson Shipbuilders in light of the Scottish Government's £20 million investment in two new hybrid ferries?

Margaret Burgess: In November 2011, we announced a £20 million contract for two state-of-the-art diesel electric and battery-powered vessels designed for use on the Caledonian MacBrayne Clyde and Hebrides ferry services. In securing the contract to build the vessels, Ferguson Shipbuilders in Port Glasgow has not only created 20 new apprenticeships but been able to support around 175 shipbuilding jobs in Port Glasgow and Inverclyde.

Haudagain Roundabout

4. Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Aberdeen City Council regarding improvements to the Haudagain roundabout. (S4O-01339)

The Minister for Transport and Veteran Affairs (Keith Brown): Transport Scotland officials last met Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Nestrans—the north east of Scotland transport partnership—on 12 April 2012 to discuss improvements to the Haudagain roundabout and other infrastructure projects. At the meeting, officials reconfirmed the Scottish Government's commitment to starting improvements to Haudagain once the Aberdeen western peripheral route has been completed.

Mark McDonald: As the minister will be aware, the traffic modelling for the Haudagain roundabout improvements showed that the works would be effective only if the third Don crossing were developed as planned. Given that Aberdeen City Council's Labour-led administration is now considering relocating the crossing or possibly scrapping it altogether, does the minister agree that such a move would put the Haudagain improvement works back at square one and would mean further expenditure by both council and Government and another lengthy planning and modelling exercise? Would it not be far better if the council administration stuck to the original plans for the third Don crossing, which would help to tackle congestion in the city?

Keith Brown: I could not agree more with the point that Mark McDonald makes. It is worth saying that all options to emerge from the Aberdeen City Council Scottish transport appraisal guidance report require both the AWPR and the third Don crossing to be in place before the solutions work effectively. If the third Don crossing is not put in place, the proposed solutions at Haudagain will simply not be effective. However, it is clear that the completion of it and the AWPR would ease the strain on the Haudagain junction and assist during the construction process for delivering improvements at that bottleneck.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Could a revised plan for a third Don crossing not work well with the current proposals for the Haudagain roundabout? Is the delay to the improvements at the Haudagain not being caused by the minister's insistence on bundling the project with the AWPR and not beginning work at the roundabout until the AWPR is completed? The work could begin right now—it is a shovel-ready project—so why does the minister not get on with it?

Keith Brown: I will have to give the same answer that I have given to the same question from Richard Baker over a number of months. I have just made the point, as has Mark McDonald, that the studies that have been done show that the benefits to come from the Aberdeen western peripheral route require the improvements to the Haudagain roundabout to come afterwards. We have taken professional advice on the matter, including the STAG report that was mentioned, and are following it. That is the order in which to do the projects.

We are, of course, frustrated by the delays to the AWPR and await the outcome of the court process. However, in the meantime, we must ensure that we go about it in the right way, not only because it will be the most effective solution but because it is the most effective use of public resources.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I accept that there are all sorts of consequences in the plans for the AWPR, the Haudagain roundabout and the third Don crossing. However, for the benefit of my constituents, the minister might want to consider whether the Government and the council can act a little more quickly to end the uncertainty for the residents whose homes are likely to be purchased by compulsory purchase orders when the upgrade to the Haudagain roundabout goes ahead. Could we have some clarity on that?

Keith Brown: As I said in my answer to the first substantive question, of course we are willing to discuss with our partners, including Aberdeen City Council, how best we can expedite the process.

The major decision is still to be taken and we are hopeful that it will be taken shortly.

I am well aware of the uncertainty that Brian Adam mentions. I am more than happy to work with our partners on that and to come back to him with a further update once we have done so.

4G Mobile Phone Services

5. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its strategy is for the roll-out of 4G mobile services. (S4O-01340)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): As set out in “Scotland’s Digital Future—Infrastructure Action Plan”, enhanced mobile coverage across the whole of Scotland is a priority for the Scottish Government. We continue to have discussions with mobile operators about improving coverage across Scotland.

As telecommunications regulation is currently reserved, the Scottish Government has limited powers on the future roll-out of 4G in Scotland. The Office of Communications has responsibility for auctioning the 4G spectrum, setting licence condition requirements—which include a coverage obligation—and ensuring that mobile operators fulfil them. The mobile operators themselves will make commercial decisions on their investment in Scotland. The Government has successfully lobbied Ofcom to secure a high 4G coverage obligation in Scotland. That has resulted in a 95 per cent indoor coverage target having been set in all four United Kingdom nations. That is a considerable improvement on the targets that were originally proposed and will extend 4G services across the whole country.

Willie Coffey: I thank the cabinet secretary for that detailed answer. I am the convener of the cross-party group on digital participation, and one of the common messages that we hear is that rural communities in particular must not lose out when new technologies are introduced. Will the cabinet secretary reassure me that the Scottish Government will do everything that it can within its powers to ensure that the roll-out of 4G mobile technologies in Scotland will serve all Scotland, not only the areas that are most lucrative for commercial service providers?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I assure Willie Coffey that that is our clear intention and determination. We will work with key industry partners to facilitate early and comprehensive roll-out of 4G throughout Scotland. As I said in my initial answer, we have already worked with Ofcom to secure a higher coverage obligation in Scotland than it originally proposed.

We are encouraged by the new timetable for 4G roll-out that has recently been agreed with mobile operators. That will ensure that 4G services are available throughout Scotland from early next year. As part of our world class 2020 programme, we will also look for opportunities to support early deployment and testing in Scotland of the next version of 4G technology, LTE advanced, or true 4G.

Liam McArthur: I welcome the cabinet secretary's response and echo Willie Coffey's comments about the importance of 4G mobile coverage, particularly in rural areas. Is the cabinet secretary aware of the process that was adopted in Germany during the last roll-out whereby there was a requirement to link up rural areas before the more populated urban areas were linked up, as a way of incentivising mobile operators not to pick the low-hanging fruit but to deal first with the difficult-to-reach areas?

Nicola Sturgeon: We are keen to have these discussions with the providers of mobile technology. As I said in a previous response, the regulatory framework is reserved. That is why it was so important that we worked with Ofcom to ensure that a higher coverage target applies across Scotland. I understand the concerns and needs of rural communities, particularly communities as remote and rural as the ones that Liam McArthur represents. We will therefore do everything that we can to ensure that nobody and no community is left behind as this very important technology is rolled out across the country.

Properties at risk of External Sewer Flooding

6. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many homes affected by external sewer flooding are listed on Scottish Water's register of properties. (S4O-01341)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Scottish Water has been tasked in this investment period to create and maintain a register of all properties that are at risk of external sewer flooding. It currently has some 2,100 locations on that register. Scottish Water is carrying out investigations to confirm whether those cases of external flooding are the result of capacity issues in the sewerage system.

Gordon MacDonald: Residents in the Kingsknowe Crescent area of my constituency have suffered since the 1990s from severe external sewer flooding. Despite assurances from Scottish Water's predecessor, East of Scotland Water, that the cause would be addressed, no work has taken place to resolve the sewer capacity issues. Scottish Water had an operating surplus of close to £300 million in 2011-12; are

there any restrictions on Scottish Water reinvesting such surpluses in capital projects to alleviate external sewer flooding?

Nicola Sturgeon: The issue that Gordon MacDonald raises is of huge importance to the constituents he refers to. I know that Scottish Water is aware of the seriousness of the external sewer flooding problem at Kingsknowe Crescent. As the member is aware, it is a complex problem that arises from the fact that sewers and drains are not large enough to drain both the sewage and the surface water in the locality when there has been high rainfall. Scottish Water is currently undertaking a study specific to Kingsknowe Crescent with the City of Edinburgh Council to try to obtain a better understanding of the problem. I understand that it will present the results of the study and the options for resolution at the meeting that you will have on 22 October.

The member also notes that Scottish Water has significant operating surpluses. In 2011-12, Scottish Water had £74 million of surplus before tax, which I can tell the chamber was fully reinvested in the improvement of services.

Construction Companies (Public Sector Contracts)

7. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that construction companies headquartered in Scotland are provided with the best possible opportunities of being successful in bidding for public sector contracts. (S4O-01342)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): As part of the Government's drive to promote sustainable economic growth, we have greatly increased ease of access to public sector contracts through the introduction of the public contracts Scotland website, which provides suppliers free of charge with a single access point to thousands of Scottish contracting opportunities.

We are also working with business to deliver improvements to the public procurement process. As I announced today, we will shortly begin a thorough review of construction procurement across the public sector and we are currently consulting on a procurement reform bill that will embed procurement systems and practices that are streamlined and business friendly.

Bruce Crawford: In my recent meetings with Robertson Construction Group and Ogilvie Homes, both of which are based in my constituency, the companies expressed concerns about the speed at which public sector contracts are being brought successfully to the marketplace and about the number of pre-qualification

questionnaires that they are required to submit compared with the number of successful outcomes. Will the cabinet secretary review those matters closely to see what can be done to speed up the contract process and remove any unnecessary and expensive burdens from the pre-qualification process?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, we will. I agree with Bruce Crawford about the importance of getting more projects under way and getting them under way more quickly. That is why, despite the significant cuts to our capital budgets, we have used innovative ways to maximise capital spending to support infrastructure investment and jobs. Examples include the national housing trust and the hub initiative.

We have worked with public and private sector representatives, including firms in the construction sector, to introduce standardised questions to test supplier capacity and capability in the pre-qualification process. Those questions are being rolled out across the public sector.

Culture and External Affairs

International Development

1. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its future budget plans are for international development. (S4O-01346)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government has committed to maintaining the international development fund at £9 million per year up to the end of the spending review period in 2014-15. That has been supplemented by a £3 million Scottish Government contribution to the climate justice fund.

The Scottish Government's £2.5 million contribution to the Scottish sport relief home and away programme will attract match funding from sport relief for development projects, approximately half of which will be in Scotland and half of which will be in the world's poorest countries.

Roderick Campbell: I welcome the minister to his new post and wish him every success. Will he provide an update on what the Scottish Government is doing internationally to protect some of the world's poorest communities, which are worst affected by climate change?

Humza Yousaf: The latest round of the international development fund supports Scotland-based organisations that work on the ground in sub-Saharan Africa and which are taking forward

projects to respond to the effects of climate change.

The member will be aware that the First Minister and the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, came together earlier this year to launch the Scottish Government's £3 million climate justice fund, for which the Scottish Government is providing £1 million a year for the next three years. That is open to applications for water projects in Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia, and the successful projects are due to be announced shortly. The groundbreaking climate justice fund is important, as it recognises that those in the developed world, who have the most, contribute most to climate change, yet the effects of climate change impact disproportionately on the poorest in the developing world.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Following the successful visit of Che Guevara's daughter Aleida to Scotland last month, which included a visit to the Parliament, will the Scottish Government consider opportunities to develop links with Cuba as part of its international development budget plans?

Humza Yousaf: The member will be aware that the international development budget is extremely tight. To get the maximum impact from that, we focus absolutely on countries that need support most—the sub-Saharan African countries that I mentioned and countries on the subcontinent that are low on the human development index. For that reason, it is important to keep a geographic and thematic focus.

I know that ministers have had engagement with Cuba and with representatives from Cuba, but there are no plans at the moment for the international development fund to go further than its current geographic focus.

The Presiding Officer: Adam Ingram's question was withdrawn, for which he has provided an entirely understandable explanation.

Youth Olympic Games 2018

3. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what involvement the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs will have with Glasgow City Council regarding the 2018 youth Olympic games under the major events strategy. (S4O-01348)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government is delighted to work with our partners Glasgow City Council and the British Olympic Association on a youth Olympic games bid that we believe will delight and surprise the International Olympic Committee. The bid falls under the portfolio responsibility of Shona Robison, the Minister for Commonwealth Games

and Sport. As a result, she chairs the bid board, on which Councillor Gordon Matheson, Glasgow City Council's leader—and, of course, Anne McTaggart's former boss—and Lord Colin Moynihan, the BOA's chair, sit.

The bid board meets regularly. The meetings have been productive and all the members are focused on producing a bid that is in keeping with the national events strategy's mission to develop events that deliver a clear and lasting impact for Scotland. The bid will emphasise the superb infrastructure that is in place and our nation's unrivalled passion for sport.

Anne McTaggart: I welcome the minister to his new post. Does he agree that we need to create a positive working relationship between stakeholders and that all elected members should be involved in helping to bring the 2018 youth Olympic games to Glasgow, to build on the legacy of the 2012 Olympic games and the 2014 Commonwealth games?

Humza Yousaf: I could not disagree with that. I absolutely endorse everything that the member says. The success of the 2012 Olympics came through collaborative, consensual working between all partners. The 2014 organising committee has met on many occasions and also takes much heart from that approach. We will do the same. In that spirit of consensus, not only do we have Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Government and the BOA working together, but every party leader in the chamber has signed up in support of the bid, as well as the independent member, Margo MacDonald. Even all the United Kingdom party leaders have signed up to it. In that spirit of consensus, I can ensure that the member is given an official Glasgow 2018 bid lanyard, which I am sure that she will wear with great pride.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): Maybe I will not be eligible for a lanyard, but if one comes I will be happy to accept it. Given the importance to the areas surrounding Glasgow of the impact of any successful bid, will the minister engage with other local authorities—for example, those in Renfrewshire and, on the north side of the Clyde, in Dunbartonshire—to consider what input they might have and what contribution they might make?

Humza Yousaf: Much as for the Glasgow 2014 bid, there have been discussions with a number of local authorities not just in the central belt and surrounding areas, but across the country, as I mentioned in my previous answer. Shona Robison is chairing and leading the bid board, and I have no doubt that she and the board will engage with the surrounding local authorities on the impact of the bid. We want to ensure that, should the bid be successful, the legacy is not just for Glasgow or

even just for the surrounding areas, but for the whole of Scotland.

Young Scots Fund

4. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made with the young Scots fund in supporting emerging young talent. (S4O-01349)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Early progress is being made through the investment of £505,000 that we have provided in 2012-13 for a graduate incentive programme with the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, which seeks to increase graduate recruitment in Scotland's small businesses. The young Scots fund is a manifesto commitment covering the five-year term of this Parliament, and planning is progressing well for the national conservation centre, the national centre for youth arts and the national performance centre for sport.

Gavin Brown: In the draft budget, the fund appears to be £12.5 million for the financial year 2013-14 but the figure drops substantially the following year to £7.5 million. Why is that?

Fiona Hyslop: As I explained, a number of the projects that are being developed now are capital projects. I am delighted to say that the national conservation centre is now attracting not only European Union funding but Heritage Lottery funding, so it will be even more ambitious than it was originally. Initially, there will be projects that relate particularly to graduate employment and the opportunities for all youth employment proposals. In most of the capital spend, especially in my portfolio area, there is a big focus on 2012 to 2014, although progress on the national performance centre for sport will be made particularly in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Digital Participation

5. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made to increase digital participation across Scotland. (S4O-01350)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The latest figures from the Scottish household survey, which was published in August, report that in 2011 more than 75 per cent of Scottish adults used the internet. The market communications report from the Office of Communications, which was published in March, reports an overall increase of 7 per cent in broadband uptake last year. A range of initiatives are under way, through the Scottish Library and Information Council, in schools and communities. In the first six months of 2012, the Scottish Government funded projects across Scotland that reached more than 4,500 people.

In the member's region, over the past five years more than 10,000 people in Fife have attended internet taster sessions in local libraries. Yesterday, Fife Council, working with the digital participation action group, which brings together public, private and third sector organisations that are committed to improving digital participation, held an event in the Rothes halls, Glenrothes, as part of the programme to increase the level of digital participation in Fife, in particular among the over-55 age group.

Liz Smith: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. Good progress is being made, but obviously online sources for services can be very important for people in rural communities. Will she give some idea of the specific commitments that the Scottish Government might have in place to help rural communities?

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, there is supply and demand. In Glasgow we have to make sure that we stimulate demand for usage, but in rural areas there are connectivity issues. My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities will be taking forward the procurement proposals, which are well advanced, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, to make sure that we have the connectivity that is required to ensure that there can be rural uptake on the supply side.

World Festival of Flight 2013

6. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussion it has had with interested parties regarding the proposed world festival of flight 2013 to be held in the Ayr constituency. (S4O-01351)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment met the co-curator of the world festival of flight 2013 in November 2011 and I met the co-curators in March this year. We both expressed our interest in the event and asked to be kept updated as the proposals progressed.

John Scott: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer. She will be aware of the growing interest in the world festival of flight 2013, including the proposed aviation film festival, the proposed aviation history exposition and the celebration of the first use of Monkton meadows as an airfield in 1913. Given the cabinet secretary's local knowledge and her role in cultural and economic development, will she give her full support to the event, including the lecture series running up to the event as well as the festival itself, please?

Fiona Hyslop: I am very interested in the festival. I think that John Scott is right to identify that film was starting to develop at the same time

as flight, so the combination of film and flight as part of the festival is very attractive. I have encouraged the organisers to contact Creative Scotland and EventScotland for what I think could be a very exciting event. I am familiar with the area—I used to spend weekends at Prestwick airport a long time ago—and I think that this is an exciting project. I wish it very well.

Cultural Exchange (Non-EU European Nations)

7. Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what cultural exchanges it is pursuing with non-European Union European nations. (S4O-01352)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government recognises the value of cultural exchanges with a range of countries across the world, including our priority countries and non-EU European countries. The Scottish Government supports the work of our partner agencies, such as Creative Scotland and the National Museum of Scotland, to pursue exchanges. For example, NMS has recently collaborated with the State Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg to bring the Catherine the Great exhibition to Edinburgh.

Cultural exchanges are an effective means of developing Scotland's international relations and promoting our unique heritage and distinctive culture, which in turn can open up opportunities for investment in Scotland, contributing to economic growth.

Colin Keir: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer. Has the Scottish Government been made aware of non-EU cultural organisations having difficulties in obtaining United Kingdom visas, which makes participation in events such as the Edinburgh festivals more difficult?

Fiona Hyslop: No concerns in that regard have been raised with me or my officials, but I suspect that any concerns would be raised with the United Kingdom Border Agency and immigration officials. However, if the member is aware of an impact on artists involved in the Edinburgh festivals, I am more than happy for him to write to me and I will investigate.

BBC Scotland

8. Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of BBC Scotland and what issues were discussed. (S4O-01353)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I met the then director general of the BBC, Mark Thompson, on 8 September 2012 and the chair of the BBC Trust, Lord Patten, on 22 September 2012, who were chairing events at which I was speaking. I

discussed cuts to BBC Scotland, in particular with Mr Thompson. I also expect to discuss that matter with the director of BBC Scotland at a meeting scheduled for 8 November 2012.

Siobhan McMahon: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and for raising the issue of cuts. In an answer to Ken Macintosh, she said that in an independent Scotland viewers will be able to

“enjoy more home-grown content, including a Scottish national broadcaster that will build on the existing staff and assets of BBC Scotland, while enjoying the same programmes and channels as they do now.”—[*Official Report*, 20 September 2012; c 11700.]

Does that mean that the new independent broadcaster will purchase the existing BBC infrastructure and resources in Scotland? How does the Scottish Government propose to fund such a generous service?

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, we will set out our programme in the white paper in November 2013, but let me reassure Siobhan McMahon that the licence fee revenue for Scotland is currently £320 million and we will certainly have a share in the assets of BBC Scotland.

I remember that Ken Macintosh was particularly concerned about whether David Attenborough’s “Frozen Planet” was shown in Ireland. I can confirm that David Attenborough’s “Frozen Planet” is shown even in independent Ireland, on RTÉ2’s television channel. I reassure the member—as I did Ken Macintosh—that the biggest threat to the BBC is currently coming from the future faced under a Tory Government as part of the union.

Historic Built Environment (Highlands and Islands)

9. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to improve the historic built environment in the Highlands and Islands, given the increase in funding to Historic Scotland as set out in the draft budget 2013-14. (S4O-01354)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The additional £1 million allocated to Historic Scotland in the budget for 2013-14 is to help the efficient management of the Historic Scotland estate, increasing opportunities for local maintenance contractors and supporting jobs throughout Scotland including the Highlands and Islands.

Mike MacKenzie: How much of the cost of repairs to Scotland’s built heritage will be clawed back by the United Kingdom Treasury in VAT imposed on repairs to historic buildings? What impact will the imposition of VAT on approved alterations to listed buildings have on our struggle to maintain the viability of our historic buildings?

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government has repeatedly requested that the UK Government stimulates economic growth in construction in the heritage sector by reducing VAT. The imposition by the UK Government of 20 per cent VAT is an attack on economic growth and the built environment. It is the wrong move and it is in the wrong direction. Using past data, the Treasury would be likely to take an amount somewhere in the range of £25 million out of the construction industry in the VAT hike for 2013-14, but what is even worse is that that tax hike to 20 per cent could discourage the commissioning of work in the first place.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister join me in welcoming Historic Scotland’s recent funding support for Campbeltown’s historic wee picture house? What other support can that cinema receive to allow its restoration project to go forward?

Fiona Hyslop: I am pleased that Historic Scotland has been able to support the film house in Campbeltown. It is a good example of how investment, in cinema houses or in borough halls the length and breadth of Scotland, is not only helping to regenerate town centres but contributing to a vibrant cultural scene. I am pleased that support has already been given and I will be interested to hear from the member about any further plans that the cinema has. I am sure that funders across the country, whether Creative Scotland or others, would be interested in that programme.

Trade Unions (International Projects)

10. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with trade unions regarding support for international projects in which they are both involved. (S4O-01355)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government is keen to engage with all sections of society in working together to promote our international engagement. There are a number of areas in which we collaborate with trade unions in Scotland. For example, at the last biannual meeting between the First Minister and the Scottish Trades Union Congress it was agreed that the STUC would undertake a study to look at lessons that could be learned from the manufacturing sector in Germany, with support from Scottish Government analysts.

The recent Mandela day celebrations were a positive example of the Scottish Government working with trade unions, civic society and local government to engage the Scottish people in international and development issues.

Drew Smith: The minister will be aware of my interest in the Fire Brigades Union's Palestinian training project that is taking place in Dundee to train some 20 fire officials from the Palestinian civil defence department. What assistance might the Scottish Government be able to provide? Specifically, is the minister examining possibilities for assisting with the accommodation of those officials?

Humza Yousaf: I thank the member for the question and note his sustained interest in and passion for the issue.

The Scottish Government has previously supported efforts in international development and aid for Palestine, including humanitarian aid for Gaza. The particular issue raised by the member is with officials and I am happy for the member to be updated once a decision is reached.

Scotland's Future

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-04340, in the name of Johann Lamont, on Scotland's future. I remind members that the debate is heavily oversubscribed. Your time limits will be extremely strict. I hope that we can accommodate all members who want to speak.

14:40

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Presiding Officer, I note what you say about the debate being oversubscribed. It is our aspiration that this be a serious debate for the whole of Scotland. The noises from the Scottish National Party benches to my right suggest that those members have no intention of having a serious debate about these matters.

Life in opposition could be very easy: sit back; do not say anything controversial; criticise the Government's weaknesses; and hope that, come the election in a few years' time, people will think that we can do a better job. However, a few weeks ago, I met a group of carers and, for me, it was the final straw with regard to things that have been worrying me for many months.

The carers were home helps—kind and compassionate people who support our elderly in their homes, providing meals and helping them to wash and to do other day-to-day tasks that most of us take for granted. While talking to them, I learned of the concept of task and go. I heard about carers who have to fit in four visits in an hour. I heard about carers who are instructed not to talk to their clients, because they simply do not have the time.

We know that there are elderly people in our communities who see a different face every time they are due a visit. We remember all too well the powerful testimony of the widow of the late Ken Maitland, who had the indignity of having more than 106 carers through his door in a year. We know that there are elderly people who opt out of the care support because it is no longer working for them. Is this really the kind of care that we want for our grandparents, our mothers and fathers, and—when the time comes—ourselves?

I decided that enough was enough. Every week, we are told by the SNP Government how wonderful life is in Scotland and that any overhanging problems can be swept away with one magic solution. The presentation that we hear from the First Minister every Thursday bears no resemblance to what I am hearing in my community and across Scotland every other week.

We are not playing the game anymore. We cannot tell these women that everything is going to be fine. We cannot finesse something that is not delivering for people. We will refuse to have respect for a Scottish Government that claims to care but refuses to acknowledge those women and their concerns—a Government that refuses to acknowledge what is going on in the real world.

The Scottish Government does not like to be confronted with reality. In March, the First Minister accused my colleague Jackie Baillie of telling scare stories about the shortage of blankets in Scottish hospitals. It took a visit to Parliament by 92-year-old Helen Macbeth and Jack Barr, a grandfather, to tell him about their experiences before he was prepared to admit that old people were going without blankets at night.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the member accept that the real people in my constituency, which is one of the neediest in the country, are very positive about no tuition fees, free prescriptions and the freeze in council tax?

Johann Lamont: I would hazard a guess that some of the women I met in Glasgow come from Mr Mason's constituency. It is no comfort to them to tell them that things are fantastic when they know, every day of their lives, that that is not the case. They asked me, "How can this go on? How is it allowed that we create these kinds of circumstances in our communities?" The member might want to hide from it, but he should listen to people across our communities who are telling us something different.

The First Minister told his party conference last year that

"the rocks will melt with the sun"

before he allows tuition fees for Scottish students. He did not say, "unless you are a part-time student or a graduate." He did not say that the rocks would melt with the sun before he cut the bursaries of Scotland's poorest students by nearly £900. He did not say that the rocks would melt with the sun before he let the number of people going to college drop by 18,000. He said none of those things; he let Michael Russell go ahead and make all of those things happen in what is probably the single biggest betrayal of Scotland's young people.

It cannot be finessed, wished away or spun, and it cannot be explained with the selective use of statistics; that is what is happening in the real world and the SNP Government refuses to acknowledge it.

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): On that point, I wonder whether Ms Lamont would like to tell us how she would reply to

NUS Scotland, which said in an e-mail to us all this morning that it is

"deeply concerned by any suggestions of a return to tuition fees for Scotland's students,"

and that it is

"clear that Scotland as a country and a society values the principle that access to education should be based on the ability to learn not the wealth to pay."

Johann Lamont: I would ask the NUS: is it right that students who cannot get a place in a further education college are to pay the price of Mike Russell's policies? We do no students a service and we do them a grave disservice by implying that one set of students is more important than another.

Mike Russell is the man who penned that great work "Grasping the Thistle", in which he tells us of his plans to privatise the national health service and informs us that Scotland's real problem with the union is that we get too much money out of it—he says that it is literally killing us with kindness. We do not agree with Mike Russell on many things but, for those members who were not watching the Labour Party conference this week and going on Twitter, let me read this passage from Mr Russell:

"Put bluntly universality now drags down both the quality of service to those most in need, and the ability of government to provide such services. However, our political parties do not have the courage to address the issue for fear of losing votes."

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I thank the member for raising my sales again. I am more than prepared to say today that my experience of the recession and of the loss of 25,000 university places south of the border makes me believe that I was wrong. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Michael Russell: That is the generous contribution to the debate that I will make. Will Ms Lamont now admit that she is wrong to victimise Scotland's young people?

Johann Lamont: I think that the real difference is that Mr Russell opposed Alex Salmond when he wrote the book but now relies on his patronage. It is illogical to say that we would spend less on the poor in a time of recession than in a time of plenty—it makes no sense whatsoever. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Johann Lamont: Unlike Mike Russell, I am not against universality. I just want to know how we are going to pay for it. We know that such concerns exist at the heart of the Government, but

those who have them are too cynical to voice them.

I will quote another one of the SNP Government's front bench, our Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Alex Neil, who said:

"It would be inappropriate to use scarce resources to provide free central heating systems for some of our retired bankers, for example, who receive substantial pensions." —[*Official Report*, 14 May 2009; c 17481.]

That is a perfectly reasonable proposition, but it is at odds with the view of the Deputy First Minister, who claims that she does not believe in means testing, even though she was the cabinet secretary in charge at the time of Alex Neil's statement.

If Nicola Sturgeon is serious about universality, I look forward to her reversing the means testing for the education maintenance allowance, which cuts off at £20,000; I look forward to her extending universality to dental treatment; I look forward to her ending hotel charges in care homes; I look forward to her withdrawing the bill that increases means testing for legal aid; and I look forward to finding out where she is going to find the money to pay for it all.

We have a Deputy First Minister who decries anyone who challenges her definition of universality and we have a First Minister who has never met a tax that he does not want to cut. We know that those things are not consistent—they are incompatible—and yet this dishonest Government continues the myth that in an independent Scotland we could have Scandinavian welfare while cutting tax to a level that would make Mitt Romney blush.

Alex Neil is right about one thing—that we have scarce resources, with £3.3 billion still to be removed from the Scottish budget. I agree with the SNP that the Tory Government is cutting too far and fast, but the reality is that those cuts will have to be addressed.

Last week, Nicola Sturgeon invented a Labour cuts commission, but what precisely did she imagine that John Swinney asked Crawford Beveridge and Campbell Christie to do? He asked, "What do we do in tough times?" and Beveridge said that we should ask not whether something is desirable but whether it is affordable and whether, in tough times, we expect those with the broadest backs to carry the heaviest burden.

Of course, Nicola Sturgeon is in complete denial, but the reality is that people out there are facing the consequences of SNP cuts every day. [*Interruption.*] SNP members might think that it is funny, but to care workers, mothers who are worried about the quality of their children's education or young people who cannot access college, it is not funny or imagined—it is the real

world. How will the SNP protect people and on whom will it put the burden?

Last year, the Christie commission report, which was commissioned by John Swinney, warned that

"Contentious issues such as the continuation of universal entitlements must be considered openly and transparently, rather than in the current polarised terms."

I urge the SNP to listen to the man who responded to its request and set up that commission. It seems that, in Scottish politics, it is just not possible to consider those issues openly and honestly. The debate has been closed down because it suits some people to keep it polarised.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Johann Lamont has said:

"Scotland cannot be the only something for nothing country in the world".

To which people in Scotland was she referring?

Johann Lamont: The fact is that the people whom I described who are living with the consequence of SNP cuts are paying the price for the SNP's pretence that everything is dead straightforward. Everybody pays a price but, in tough times, it ought not to be the weak and the vulnerable—it should be those of us with the broader backs.

I believe that my approach is in the national interest. The easy option for me as leader of the Opposition would have been to sit back, put my fingers in my ears and pretend that we can afford to pay for everything for evermore. However, I care too much about Scotland to do that and I care too much about public services to let them bleed to death. The debate that I called for is not one about universality versus means testing; it is about what we can and cannot afford. It is about affordability and sustainability and how we protect the most vulnerable in these tough times.

What the SNP has to say about universality will be of little comfort to young people from poor backgrounds who cannot get a place at college, older people who are faced with declining standards of care, and people who lose their jobs.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member is in her last 30 seconds.

Johann Lamont: The reality is that the SNP does not have a basic understanding of fairness. In my remaining time, I can give only one example. Is it fair that a mother has to pay £5 a day for breakfast club and £11 a day for after-school club just so that she can get to work?

We want and need an open and honest debate. As long as the SNP closes down the debate,

makes a false argument about the challenges and remains in denial about the cuts that it is implementing, the people who pay the price will be those across Scotland who do not have the power of sitting at the table with Alex Salmond and having his ear. The poor people in our communities and working families are concerned. They have the right to have their voices heard and the Government has an obligation to respond to them.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that cuts are currently taking place at both national and local level and having an impact on people's daily lives; recognises that it is those most in need that are often acutely affected by these cuts; notes that the Centre for Public Policy for Regions has calculated that over three quarters of the real-terms decline in resource spend has still to come; recognises that, at the same time, demographic and social pressures are increasing; agrees with the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services that "Contentious issues such as the continuation of universal entitlements must be considered openly and transparently, rather than in the current polarised terms", and calls on all members to consider how to fully fund and sustain high quality public services in Scotland that best support the needs of Scots now and in the future.

14:54

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): It is always good to start on a consensual note, so let me kick off with something on which I agree with Johann Lamont. We have big questions to ask and answer about the future of Scotland and the kind of country that we want to be, so I do not criticise her for asking the questions. Unlike her friends on the Tory benches, however, I take issue with the conclusion that she has reached.

That conclusion has its roots in Labour's deeply misguided belief that this Parliament should be responsible for divvying up the national cake but that it should have no power to influence the overall size of that cake. That conclusion puts at risk many of the hard-won social policy victories of this Parliament, such as free personal care for the elderly, and the council tax freeze that only five months ago was backed by Labour when it promised to continue with that approach for the next five years.

Nick Clegg has apologised for breaking his promises in Government; Labour must be the first party on record to manage to break its promises from opposition. That would be funny were it not so tragic. It beggars belief that a Labour leader would reach the conclusion that the best response to Tory cuts is to take away benefits and opportunities from pensioners, the sick, families who are already struggling to make ends meet,

and working-class kids who aspire to a university education.

Johann Lamont: First, does the cabinet secretary think that Campbell Christie was a Tory? Secondly, the responsibility of Government, regardless of the size of the cake, is to ensure that the cake is distributed fairly. By any test, her decisions and those of her Government have not led to a fair distribution. It is not good enough to say that we do not have the powers; the Government still has the responsibility. The cake is the size it is and the Government needs to answer why it has not distributed it fairly.

Nicola Sturgeon: I will come on to the choices that we should be able to make, but let us first remind ourselves about how Johann Lamont described policies designed to take pressure off household budgets, to give our elderly people dignity and peace of mind, and to ensure that education is not the preserve of the wealthy but open to all who have the ability to learn. She called all those policies part of a "something for nothing" culture. What an insult to those who work hard, pay their taxes, save what they can and simply expect that their Government give them something back in return.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Is it dignified to lie in a hospital bed without a blanket?

Nicola Sturgeon: Labour is arguing that we should remove free personal care from our elderly. I take no lessons in dignity from anybody on the Labour side of the chamber.

Here is the lie. Labour tries to say that it is all about making the well-off pay more—people such as Johann Lamont and me—but let me tell Labour the truth and say who Johann Lamont has really put in the frame and who she has chosen to make this debate about. She has made the debate about the pensioner in my constituency who has worked all her life and who told me recently that, before concessionary travel, she rarely saw her elderly sister who lives in Inverness but that she can now do so whenever she wants; the woman with a serious, life-limiting chronic condition earning not much more than £16,000 a year who told me that she often had to choose which of her medicines to take because she could not afford to buy them all; the dementia sufferer, whose free personal care may make the difference between her having to sell her family home and not; and the young person from a working-class family who dreams of going to university but who knows that if she has to pay tuition fees she will not be able to do so.

Johann Lamont likes to make things personal, so let me tell her that that last anecdote is about me—I was that working-class kid going to university. We are the beneficiaries of free

education; we have no right to pull up the ladder of opportunity and deprive today's young people of what we took for granted. Those are the people that Johann Lamont has chosen to make the debate about. No wonder that voices in her party are calling her approach chaotic and shambolic.

Let us put it to the test. Hands up those on the Labour benches who think that we should take away the bus pass. Hands up those who think that we should reintroduce tuition fees or take away free personal care. Hands up those who think that we should restore prescription charges. *[Interruption.]*

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab) *rose—*

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): The cabinet secretary used two examples—elderly people and the services that they rely on, and a young person going to university. What is her answer to the elderly person who faces an unfair system of social care charging? What is her answer to the student applying to college this year, under the SNP Government, and not when she was a student applying for university?

Nicola Sturgeon: It is that this Parliament should have power to grow the economy and to increase revenues and should not be forced to choose between one student and another. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order. We cannot hear the cabinet secretary.

Nicola Sturgeon: Those on the Tory benches would have been quick to put their hands up to my questions, because all the people that I talk about are people that Labour thinks should bear the brunt of Tory cuts—the people that Labour would subject to the indignities of means testing for their bus pass or their personal care.

We think differently. We will protect the council tax freeze, free education, bus passes, personal care for our elderly and the principle of healthcare free at the point of need. We will do it within a balanced budget—a budget that has been cut year on year by the Tory Government that Labour is so keen to team up with—and we will strive to boost growth, to protect jobs and household budgets, and to make Scotland a fairer place to live.

Neil Findlay *rose—*

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I think that it was a mistake right enough, but I think that I am the only one here old enough to have a bus pass.

Members: No.

Margo MacDonald: The cabinet secretary gave the example of her constituent's elderly sister in Inverness. My sister will kill me for saying that she is elderly but, although I believe utterly in the principle of universality, I would not mind having a

certain number of passes per year that I could use to go and see my sister. The cabinet secretary was asking for ideas. She could tinker with the bus pass without giving up the principle.

Nicola Sturgeon: Stewart Stevenson might take issue with the member's claim to be the only person in the Parliament who qualifies for a bus pass.

We hear lots of examples cited of millionaires who qualify for bus passes. Most of them will not use their bus passes, and we do not pay for people who do not use their bus passes. People like my constituent rely on the bus pass—those are the people whom Labour wants to penalise. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: The point is that we have made choices and they are choices that we will stand by and choices that we were elected on.

However, those choices are not the biggest difference between Labour and the SNP. The biggest difference is that, while Labour is happy to accept a future for Scotland that has us simply deciding how we pass on Tory cuts, we are not. The real tragedy of Johann Lamont's speech is that she has allowed herself to be imprisoned in a Tory straitjacket. We think differently. We want all of this country's resources to be available to this Parliament so that we can seek to chart a different course and shape a different future.

I have said it before and I will say it again: independence is not a magic pill. It will not take away the difficult financial climate or the difficult decisions that we face but it will open up different choices.

Neil Findlay *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is in her last minute.

Nicola Sturgeon: In Johann Lamont's world, the only choices are whether to punish the pensioner or the student and whether to pass the cuts to the sick or the family struggling with council tax. With independence, we will have the ability to make different choices: the choice to get our economy growing faster so that revenues increase and the choice to shape a welfare system that reduces welfare costs by lifting people out of poverty. We will also have the choice—the real choice—not to spend hundreds of millions of pounds on Trident nuclear weapons but to invest instead in the things that really matter.

That is the real debate. It is a debate about who will determine the choices that define our politics and who will shape our future as a country: a right-wing Tory Government or this Parliament and the people whose lives are affected by the decisions

that we take. I know that it was not Johann Lamont's intention, but I have no doubt that her interventions last week will lead many more people to the latter option and to the conclusion that our destiny should be in our own hands—the conclusion that Scotland will be better off independent.

I move amendment S4M-04340.4, to leave out from “that cuts” to end and insert:

“the clear choice now facing the people of Scotland between managing a declining budget determined by the priorities of a UK Government or choosing a better way in which a Scottish Parliament, elected by the people of Scotland, has access to Scotland's resources in order to ensure a fairer, wealthier and stronger society; recognises the health, societal and economic benefits of the universal provision provided under devolution and rejects the idea that this offers “something for nothing”; welcomes the actions taken by the Scottish Government since 2007 to ensure the sustainability of spending in Scotland, including the focus on preventative spending, reform of public services and the empowerment of communities as set out in the Independent Budget Review and the report of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, and agrees that, in order to ensure that Scotland reaches its full potential, can tackle poverty, protect key public services such as the NHS and deliver a socially just and economically vibrant society, it is necessary for the Scottish Parliament to have the full powers of an independent parliament.”

15:05

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The Deputy First Minister began her speech on a note of consensus, so I will begin mine on a note of consensus. I agree entirely with Nicola Sturgeon when she says that independence is not a magic pill—it is nothing of the sort.

Neil Findlay: Will Mr Brown take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: Normally, I would not take an intervention so early in my speech but, as Mr Findlay has been desperate to intervene on every speaker, I will take one.

Neil Findlay: Is the magic pill that the member talks about the same one that is being given to prisoners in jail for their conjugal rights?

Gavin Brown: I have no comment to make on that—I am genuinely stumped.

Let us be serious. If we are honest, the debate on universal services is not one that any member wants to have. People like universal services. Inaction on those services feels like the path of least resistance and, in the short term, it most certainly is. It is not a debate that we want to have, but it is a debate that we need to have. I agree with what Johann Lamont had to say on that point. We must take some decisions now, and we must look into the issue extremely carefully.

Why? First, universal services cost substantial sums of money. In a report last year, Audit Scotland said that the combined cost of free personal care, eye tests and travel was around £870 million a year and rising. That is not to say that the Conservative Party or any party in the Parliament wants to get rid of any of those services as the Deputy First Minister suggested—I make that absolutely clear—but it means that we should look at how they operate, including the age limit and other criteria that make people eligible for them. Holding that view does not mean automatically that we want to get rid of them.

Those services cost a lot of money. At the same time, we face a tough environment for public finances, with demographic change coming in behind it. Between 2008 and 2033, the number of people aged 60 or over will rise by 50 per cent, and the number of people aged 75 or over is set to almost double. If we are honest, we know that doing nothing is not an option. It is not good enough just to make a stump speech about independence. It is important to look carefully, critically and analytically at the issues.

Today, the Scottish Government has given the impression that it is not open to any discussion on any universal service. Let us look at bus travel, on which the Deputy First Minister gave the impression that there is no chance of anything changing under the SNP. A couple of years ago—in 2009—in its own review of the Scotland-wide free bus travel scheme, the Scottish Government concluded:

“there may be a case in the future for examining the value for money of concessionary travel for those passengers over the age of 60 in full time employment”.

One of the final recommendations in that report was

“That further work should be undertaken specifically to examine the long-term sustainability of the Scheme.”

In 2009, the Scottish Government accepted that the system could be reviewed and that the age criteria could be changed over time, but in 2011, just before the Scottish Parliament elections, it was suddenly against the idea and felt that such changes would be a terrible crime. Ever since, the Government has made it sound as though anyone who questions concessionary travel automatically wants to remove it. What a lot of rot, given the Government's own words a mere three years ago.

The reason why it is so important to examine our universal services is that they are primarily demand driven. With the very best of intentions, we have created demand-driven engines in our budget. Professor David Bell said:

“the big thing about universal services is that they are open-ended commitments. I think that they should be revisited every five years to see whether they remain

affordable.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 25 January 2012; c 578.]

It is also important to look at the afford-to-pay principle. We heard some discussion of that and we heard some examples of people who benefited from the concessionary travel scheme—Nicola Sturgeon gave an excellent and perfectly fair example. However, we also hear examples of people who can and are perfectly willing to pay but who do not pay because they have free bus passes. We could trade examples, but let us look at what the former Auditor General for Scotland had to say. He is someone who did not just assume that millionaires did not go on the bus although they have bus passes. He said:

“the cost of providing free transport to people who are over 60 and still in employment is £34 million or so.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 25 January 2012; c 587.]

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member is finishing.

Gavin Brown: I have only 12 seconds left, Mr McDonald. I apologise, but I cannot take your intervention.

My amendment is likely to be defeated, because Mr Swinney’s will pass. However, we have asked that, as a first step, the Scottish Government agrees to publish in a few months’ time 10 years’ worth of projected data for universal services so that we can all analyse the figures to the best of our ability and have an open, honest and transparent debate on the issue.

I move amendment S4M-04340.3, to leave out from first “cuts” to end and insert:

“demographic and social pressures are increasing; agrees with the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services that “Contentious issues such as the continuation of universal entitlements must be considered openly and transparently, rather than in the current polarised terms”; calls on all members to consider how to fully fund and sustain high quality public services in Scotland that best support the needs of Scots now and in the future, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish, by the end of 2012, the most accurate possible forecasts for spending on universal services in Scotland for each of the next 10 years.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to open debate. I remind members that time is very tight. I cannot compensate for interventions, so it is the member’s choice whether to take them.

15:11

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): When I first saw that the title of the Opposition debate was “Scotland’s Future”, I thought that we would be debating the fact that six months after Scottish

Labour’s leader announced her intention to appoint a “let’s try again to kill independence stone dead” commission, she had finally confirmed its members and timetable. However, this debate is about a different Labour commission—the “let’s kill the principles of the Labour Party in Scotland stone dead” commission, or, as Johann Lamont called it earlier, the cuts commission.

The motion invites us to agree with Campbell Christie that we require open and transparent consideration, rather than consideration on the current polarised terms. Yesterday on BBC Radio, Johann Lamont called for “a mature debate”. However, last week, Johann Lamont made it clear that for her, the debate is over. In the language of *The Daily Mail*, she targeted Scotland’s elderly, her sick, and her young people to carry the can for the economic crisis that was precipitated by Labour and worsened by the Tories. The welfare state—trumpeted by the better together campaign as the “glue of the Union”—was dismissed by Johann Lamont as the “something for nothing culture”. She tells us that we misunderstand. She simply wants a debate and claims not to know in what direction Labour’s policy is heading. Unfortunately for her, we don’t need to rely on Johann Lamont to see where Labour is going.

Watching Labour’s conference, I saw Margaret Curran, Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland at Westminster, rush ahead of Johann Lamont, leader of Scottish Labour, to greet Ed Miliband. That action revealed Labour’s true pecking order. It reminded me that, as long ago as January, Margaret Curran gave much the same speech as Johann Lamont gave last week. So, Margaret Curran at Westminster signals policy changes on devolved matters before Johann Lamont gets there.

That was of course reinforced by Liam Byrne—he of the note that said “there’s no money left”. Ironically, Mr Byrne is now Labour’s welfare spokesman. At the Labour conference, he said:

“There has always been a balance in the welfare state between universal benefits and targeted benefits and I’m afraid as part of Ed’s zero-based review that balance has got to be looked at”.

So, what was trumpeted as being the leader of Scottish Labour laying out her stall in a grand speech was actually just a badly executed part of a London-led campaign aimed at the 2015 United Kingdom election. The more Johann Lamont struggles to align her actions to Labour’s UK campaign, the clearer it becomes that the term “Scottish Labour” is just an electoral fig leaf. London calls the shots and is more interested in Scotland’s voting strength than it is in allowing Scots to have the power to make decisions that affect their children, their families, their community and their country.

Scottish Labour even called in its fourth emergency service—Douglas Alexander—to try to rescue that speech. He invoked Aneurin Bevan, who said:

“The language of priorities is the religion of socialism”.

The priorities of the people of Scotland, socialist or otherwise, are different from those of United Kingdom Labour. The people of Scotland showed that clearly when they voted in May last year for the SNP—a party that espouses social democratic values and laid out an honest manifesto.

Of course Labour’s 2011 manifesto included a pledge that there would be

“no upfront or back-end tuition fees for Scottish university students.”

Scottish Labour has welcomed the abolition of prescription charges, and as we heard from the Deputy First Minister, Labour’s council candidates pledged council tax freezes and falsely accused the SNP of trying to do away with concessionary bus travel. Yet Labour members wonder why no one takes them seriously when they say that they want an honest and mature debate.

Yes, choices have to be made. The SNP Government has made hard choices and has competently and efficiently delivered balanced budgets.

The much-loved and much-missed Campbell Christie explained that a supportive and inclusive society is about much more than money. He said:

“People say we can’t afford things now but in 1948 we couldn’t afford the NHS and the pension schemes but we did it”.

It is about the common good. It is not about people wanting something for nothing.

That is not to pretend that there is no crisis—of course there is a crisis. So much for the union dividend. However, if we are to deal properly with the crisis, make choices, decide priorities and maintain the values that Scotland holds dear, we need power over all aspects of tax and welfare.

Whatever the outcome of the 2015 election, Labour cannot or will not deliver. The better-together parties want to maintain the status quo—Westminster business as usual—extracting maximum benefit from Scotland for the UK Treasury.

If we follow Labour’s line, the price will be wholesale withdrawal of benefits from low-paid Scots and a bloated bureaucracy to enforce means testing. Who would have thought, after all the years of the working people’s struggle, that the best that the Labour Party could offer would be an end to universal benefits and one-nation conservatism?

The only way to get the powers that this Parliament needs and to sustain Scotland’s values is by voting a resounding yes to a Scotland with the full powers of independence. I support John Swinney’s amendment.

15:17

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): It is a shame when a debate as significant and serious as this one is reduced to sloganising about independence. Whether or not Scotland votes to separate from the rest of the United Kingdom, we will still have to confront the problem that is in front of us and we will still have to face up to hard realities. That will not change, whatever Scotland decides.

The SNP is attempting to present itself as favouring universalism while all the other parties are against it, so let us get this clear from the start: the SNP is not in favour of universalism. The SNP has not advocated universal housing benefit or council tax benefit. It did not argue for universal free central heating systems. It does not support universalism in the context of NHS dental treatment, NHS optical vouchers, travel costs to hospitals, free school meals or legal aid. This debate is not about one party supporting universalism and the others opposing it.

The debate should be about what we regard as our country’s priorities and how we use our resources to tackle those priorities. Is it a priority to do something for the sick, the disabled and the disadvantaged? Is it right to skew resources in favour of people who are least able to look after themselves? Or do we think that the easiest thing to do is to give all members of the Scottish Parliament more money, through a council tax freeze, through free prescriptions and in other ways?

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Given what the member has just said, what about the position of Glasgow City Council, which promised a five-year council tax freeze in May?

Hugh Henry: It is in exactly the same position as my own council in Renfrewshire, which said the same thing in the local government election campaign. The reality is that if those councils do not freeze the council tax for five years they will be financially penalised by this SNP Government. They faced a very hard choice: were they willing to make the elderly, the poor, the sick and the disabled pay even more as a result? They decided, pragmatically and correctly, that they could not do so.

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): Will the member give way?

Hugh Henry: No.

What is the reality of what is happening in our councils across the country? I can speak only from my experience in Renfrewshire; in fact, Renfrewshire Council's ex-leader, Derek Mackay, is in the chamber this afternoon. In 2010, under this SNP Government, that council faced £75 million of cuts targeted over three years—and the situation has worsened. It produced what it termed a difficult choices consultation and decided that in order to do all these things that are so good for everyone in the chamber it would have to cut £300,000 from home care services, £175,000 from care homes for older people and £743,000 from the social work budget.

As for the question whether we believe in universalism, do we believe in it for those who have to rely on community alarms and who had to pay more money for that service? Do we believe in universalism for the older people who go to and get meals at day centres? We asked them to pay more every day for those facilities. Do we believe in universalism for those who need extra care and get housing meals? We put up their charges by £7 a week. Do we believe in universalism for disabled people or those with learning disabilities who need transport to day centres? In Renfrewshire, when Derek Mackay was council leader, we decided to charge them £2.50 a day so that people like me could get their council tax freeze. Is that fair? Is that humane? Where is the universalism there?

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): Mr Henry referred to the consultations that councils have carried out—in this case, Renfrewshire's. Is he aware that when the choices were outlined and communities asked whether they supported the council tax freeze—no matter whether it was SNP policy—the public in Renfrewshire, even in light of all the information, still chose to have it?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Henry, you have 30 seconds.

Hugh Henry: This will be the same Derek Mackay who voted to give free school meals to the school that his child attended while cutting all the other services. He can afford it. This debate—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order!

Hugh Henry: This debate should be about priorities for the least well-off. The SNP has shown that it has no care or compassion for those people.

15:23

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Of utmost importance to me and I am sure everyone in the chamber is Scotland's future, whether as a normal independent nation, which I obviously

favour; as a country with the limited powers that we currently have; or as a country with more powers, as promised by the Prime Minister earlier this year. Time will tell and the people of Scotland will decide.

I grew up at a time when the economic heart—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order! I cannot hear the member.

Stuart McMillan: When I was growing up, Inverclyde's economic heart was being systematically dismantled by a Tory UK Government. In that time, Inverclyde, the area where I still live, has survived. Nevertheless, there have been some positives. For example, Ferguson Shipbuilders in Port Glasgow, through Scottish Government investment, is building the world's first two hybrid ferries and creating jobs, and Stepper Technology in Greenock has doubled its workforce over the past year. Nevertheless, more needs to be done.

There have been huge challenges and there still are, but Inverclyde—the area where I grew up and still live—can have a successful future. As well as addressing employment issues, we need to ensure that we protect everyone who lives there.

That is where the Parliament has worked, not only for Inverclyde but for Scotland. It has introduced a number of initiatives that have had a positive impact on all our constituents: free personal care for the elderly, free eye tests, the concessionary travel scheme, free dental check-ups, free prescriptions and the council tax freeze.

I note that the West Dunbartonshire Council leader, Martin Rooney, only today warmly welcomed the council tax freeze in the *Lennox Herald*. He said:

"we have no plans to raise council tax over the next five years. I accept the right of my leader of the Labour Party to make these comments"—

the comments from last week—

"but we've made plans".

I agree with him on that point.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will Stuart McMillan accept that it is perfectly reasonable for local councils to make their own decisions about setting local taxes? Indeed, is that not the right way to go in future?

Stuart McMillan: I agree that local authorities should make their own decisions, but I also—*[Interruption.]* I also agree that the council tax freeze has been hugely beneficial throughout Scotland, including West Dunbartonshire.

I also appreciate that Scotland and other parts of these islands face financial challenges due to

the huge debt burden left by UK Labour and the failing austerity measures introduced by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition—a cuts agenda that goes too far and too fast.

We all know that the former chancellor—and now the leader of the anti-independence campaign—Alistair Darling said that Labour's cuts would be deeper and tougher than Thatcher's. He said that before he was booted out of office in 2010. I know how Margaret Thatcher's cuts affected Inverclyde and I assure members that I do not want to go back to that.

Johann Lamont's speech last week and the verbal gymnastics that happened in its aftermath only highlight to SNP members what Scotland's continuing in the union would look like. Like Mr Miliband and Disraeli, I, too, can use the phrase "one nation". With one nation, they will slash more services. In one nation, we will pay more council tax. We should vote for one nation if we want free personal care to be scrapped, if we want to pay tuition fees and if we want to pay for prescriptions. The list could go on, and I am happy to provide some more helpful slogans to the anti-independence campaign.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Will Stuart McMillan give way?

Stuart McMillan: I have already taken one intervention.

According to Professor Arthur Midwinter, who advises Labour on its cuts commission, all universal provision is on the table. If we are to have an open and honest debate with everything on the table, will Labour confirm or deny whether any of the following will be on the hit list? Will free eye tests and dental check-ups be on it? Are there to be fewer apprenticeships when, week in, week out, Labour members continually call for more apprenticeships?

We have already heard about Glasgow. In its campaign in Glasgow in May this year, Labour's manifesto highlighted the fact that Glasgow City Council was the first council to introduce the council tax freeze—a manifesto policy on which Johann Lamont obviously campaigned. As I said a few moments ago, Martin Rooney of West Dunbartonshire Council obviously agrees with that policy.

Labour in Glasgow also pledged to provide an affordable warmth dividend of £100 to all people aged over 80 every winter. Will that now be a goner? It also stated that it would continue to

"provide free swimming for the under 18s and over 60s, free golf for the under 18s and free bowling and tennis for all",

and said:

"Labour will extend free golf on Council courses to the over 60s."

Labour's contribution to the debate is clear and obvious. It is that we should pay more council tax, pay for prescriptions if we are ill and pay for eye tests and dental check-ups. It is that senior citizens should pay for travel and their personal care. However, if we play golf, swim, bowl or play tennis, we can do it for free.

The praise that has been lavished on Johann Lamont by her Tory friends in Scotland and Wales may be nice for her to hear, but it is galling for Scotland's senior citizens, who remember Margaret Thatcher. Who would have thought that Johann Lamont would become Scotland's Margaret Thatcher?

Johann Lamont: I wonder how Stuart McMillan feels about his leader saying that the people of Scotland did not have a problem with Thatcher's economic policies.

Stuart McMillan: I am sorry, but I say again to Johann Lamont: who would have thought that she would become Scotland's Margaret Thatcher?

People to whom I have spoken have been shocked by Labour's conversion to Tory policies, but all members know that they are joined at the hip in the better together campaign. They should change the title of the campaign from better together to poorer together. At least some honesty would then come from the unionist parties in the debate.

Let us support Scotland and back John Swinney's amendment.

15:30

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): We have faced many challenges in this Parliament, but we did so secure in the knowledge of year-on-year budget uplifts and the trend of increasing resources. We all know that times have changed. The economic forecast remains bleak; unemployment is rising and it remains persistently above the level in the rest of the UK in percentage terms; there are 30,000 fewer public sector workers and our public services are under enormous strain. This is not about talking Scotland down; it is about recognising the reality of the situation that we face in our communities across Scotland.

Over the next few years, our budget is likely to fall by £5.5 billion. We have so far managed to save about 25 per cent of what is required, so it does not take a genius to work out that three quarters of the cuts are still to come.

Meanwhile, out in the real world families are squaring up to that challenge to their household budgets. They are looking at what they need

rather than what they want and are considering what is essential rather than what is desirable. It is time that this Government did the same. We need an honest debate that is explicit about the choices that we make. We should not let things happen by default.

At the heart of the debate is social justice, which is the issue that brought many of us into politics and motivates many of us across the chamber to this day. That does not diminish because we have a debate about universal versus targeted provision. It is false for the SNP to propose that one is somehow against the other, because the issue is much more complex than that.

Most mature countries have a mix of universal and targeted social policies. The truth is that many will have systems of targeting within a universal framework, with extra benefits afforded to low income groups.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: I will give way to Margo MacDonald.

Margo MacDonald: I thank the member for giving way—I know that she is under time pressure.

I think that at least two of us on this side of the chamber agree with her absolutely in principle. We have to accept that we are making the best of a bad job. She said that we have been promised that the situation will continue for about 20 years. Does she now see why people want to vote yes in the referendum?

Jackie Baillie: The problem that I have with that premise is that this Government argues that somehow things will be better if people vote for independence. However, people are suffering now and the Government is not dealing with that.

When members consider that the NHS largely functions as a universal benefit—it is free at the point of need and everyone receives a service—they must also consider that parts of it are not universal. To name but a few such examples: NHS dental treatment is means tested, optical vouchers for people to get their glasses are means tested and travel to hospitals is means tested.

I will touch on free prescriptions. The cost of making prescriptions free was £57 million last year and the cost is projected to rise to £61 million next year. That is enough to pay the salaries of 2,000 nurses. That is the choice.

As a nation we spend £1.18 billion on prescriptions—that is a lot of money.

Fiona McLeod: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is projecting a £30 million increase in its prescribing budget this year. It also plans to cut the number of clinical staff by an extra £15 million—that is 500 nurses.

What is the choice? Hands up those on the SNP benches who want 2,500 fewer nurses and midwives—taking their numbers to a seven-year low. No one has raised a hand. Is that the exchange for free prescriptions? We have a choice to make.

Hands up those on the SNP benches who believe that providing an advantage for people such as bankers is right when food banks are appearing in our towns and cities. That is the choice that we face.

For the final time, hands up those on the SNP benches who are content to ignore the anecdotal evidence from general practitioners that people are presenting for cold remedies or indigestion tablets that they would previously have bought over the counter, and to continue to provide free prescriptions rather than investing in patient care. That is the choice, and I see no hands going up.

Last week, Nicola Sturgeon talked about a “dividing line”. Today’s performance shows that she clearly does not realise that the time for soundbite policies and retail politics is over. We need to reflect on the reality of our financial circumstances and to decide what is important now, not at some point in the distant future.

In coming to a close, I will talk about social care. Local government is shouldering the burden. It has been passed 83 per cent of the Scottish Government’s budget cuts, yet those in local government are the very people whom we expect to deliver on the increasing demand for social care. For the first time, people are paying for essential services such as home helps, community alarms and aids and equipment for the disabled. Some costs have risen by 50 per cent in the past three years.

There is a postcode lottery of care. We have different charges, different eligibility criteria and a system of rationing that sees 15-minute care visits as ticking the box. That is not social justice; that is the consequence of the choices that the SNP Government has made.

We all say that we believe in social justice, but we need the courage to deliver it. In times of scarcity, it is essential to target our resources at people who face the biggest challenge.

Presiding Officer, I will leave you with a quick quote.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish.

Jackie Baillie: The quote is:

"The current and future challenges we face could, if not properly responded to, threaten the fabric of social cohesion in Scotland."

Those are the words of Campbell Christie.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish.

Jackie Baillie: The Government cares about division, derision and denial. That is its motto and the people of Scotland deserve better.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speeches must be of six minutes; otherwise, the Presiding Officers will need to use the nuclear option of cutting off microphones or will have to drop people from the debate.

15:36

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I very much welcome the debate. Given the reaction to Johann Lamont's speech last week, not least in her party—I watched closely the reaction to her speech today and I cannot say that her back benchers universally welcomed it—I would have thought that the subject was best avoided. However, who am I to look a gift horse in the mouth? I am happy to speak in the debate.

Jackie Baillie is absolutely right—people are suffering now, and we recognise that. It is interesting to hear the Labour Party and Jackie Baillie say that people cannot wait until the referendum in 2014 because they are suffering now. Given that, why will the commission that Labour has established to come up with all these solutions to help people who are suffering now not report until 2015, which is one year after the referendum?

Johann Lamont: The next meeting of our economy group will take place next Monday. When will Mr Swinney start acting on what Campbell Christie and Crawford Beveridge said?

Jamie Hepburn: I am sure that we all wait with bated breath for the findings of Labour's economy committee and look forward to hearing what it says.

I was surprised by Johann Lamont's announcement last week, which seemed to be predicated on the idea of Scotland having a something-for-nothing culture. I reject such divisive terminology, which it is unfortunate to inject into public debate. More than that, I do not accept that there is a something-for-nothing culture; let us remember that people pay taxes into the system.

Why can Johann Lamont not explain what she means by the something-for-nothing culture? On "Good Morning Scotland" yesterday, she was

asked four times to explain what she meant by that, but not once could she explain it. I am happy to give way if she can tell me what she means by "something for nothing".

Johann Lamont: I will tell the member what I mean—I mean us getting free prescriptions, the price of which is paid by somebody who cannot get the care that they need in our community, and I mean the women who spoke to me last week. Nobody gets anything for nothing—somebody somewhere bears the cost. I am happy to pay through taxation, but the reality is that, under the SNP's budgets, what is happening—

Jamie Hepburn: I look forward to—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Johann Lamont: The SNP's policies—

Jamie Hepburn: —Johann Lamont supporting independence in 2014, so that the Parliament has powers over taxation and we can instigate a proper system of progressive taxation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. Mr Hepburn, you took the intervention.

Jamie Hepburn: Should I let her chunter on?

Johann Lamont: Alex Salmond said that he would cut corporation taxes in an independent Scotland. How would that improve the public purse?

Jamie Hepburn: I did not hear the end of Johann Lamont's intervention, but I was not particularly interested in hearing it anyway.

I am surprised not only by the Labour Party's terminology but by its change in position.

Linda Fabiani rightly mentioned a number of pronouncements by Labour figures at the Labour Party conference. Yesterday, Ed Miliband referred to the Tory-Liberal Government as an

"incompetent, hopeless, out of touch, U-turning, pledge-breaking, make it up as you go along, back of the envelope, miserable shower".

He is absolutely correct to refer to the Tories and the Liberals in that way. However, I suggest that he should look closer to home, at the Scottish Labour Party and Johann Lamont.

Let us look at the 2011 Labour Party manifesto. Labour pledged that it would not instigate tuition fees and that it would not reintroduce charges for prescriptions in Scotland. It said that it would sustain the concessionary travel scheme and it talked about retaining the commitment to free personal care. Now, we have a cuts commission where nothing is off the table. So, when Ed Miliband refers to an

"incompetent, hopeless, out of touch, U-turning, pledge-breaking, make it up as you go along, back of the envelope, miserable shower",

he could be talking about Johann Lamont and Scottish Labour.

Johann Lamont has suggested that the volte-face is predicated on injecting honesty into the debate. Given that the commitments to which I have just referred were made in Labour's election manifesto last year, is it not safe to say that Labour presented a dishonest prospectus before last year's election?

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): In terms of the issues before this Parliament, can Mr Hepburn explain how his party will deal with families living in overcrowded accommodation in my constituency? What budget choices will he make to address that concern on the ground now?

Jamie Hepburn: More homes are being built by this Government than were ever built by the Labour Government—that is how we are dealing with that.

I will talk about why what the Scottish Government is doing is important. It has been interesting to hear the council tax freeze criticised on the basis that the wealthiest are benefiting the most. Frankly, that is not the case. The figures for this year show the average impact of the council tax freeze by income decile: the percentage of net household income saved by the council tax freeze among the bottom 10 per cent is 0.8 per cent whereas among the top 10 per cent it is 0.3 per cent. The poorest in society are benefiting most from the council tax freeze.

I finish on an important point about free prescriptions. I want Johann Lamont to explain to the 600,000 people earning under £16,000 who benefit from free prescriptions why they should not do so. I would not want to have to tell the 7,000 people in my constituency and the nearly 9,000 people in her constituency who are in that position why they should not benefit in that way.

Johann Lamont: It is not 9,000.

Jamie Hepburn: She should know that it is 600,000 people because it was from an answer to a question lodged by Johann Lamont that we established that there are 600,000 people earning £16,000 or less who are benefiting from free prescriptions.

I look forward to an honest debate continuing.

15:43

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): It is interesting that Jamie Hepburn started his sometimes reasonable speech by saying that he welcomed the debate. No one would have thought

that last week, given the hysterical reaction from the SNP benches. It was hysterical to the point of trying to shut down the debate, which is interesting because it was two reports that the SNP Government commissioned—the reports of the independent budget review and the Christie commission—that asked for a non-polarised debate and transparency, as Gavin Brown suggested, on the cost of universal benefits. The independent budget review also said that the universal benefits were commendable but may simply no longer be affordable and called for a debate. I am pleased that Jamie Hepburn now thinks that there should be a debate because I, too, think that there should be one.

That does not mean that we are against universal benefits. The Liberal Democrats and our colleagues in the Labour Party, when we were in government together, delivered many universal benefits including free dental and eye checks, free personal care, free tuition—I whisper that one—and free bus passes. We delivered many universal benefits together—it was not the SNP that delivered those, although one would not think that now. We delivered those things together, and we are not against universal benefits in principle. The issue is not universalism but what wider benefit we get from the investment, which must be evidence based.

For instance, we face big challenges on health—as one of the sickest nations in Europe, we need to tackle that—and on life chances and social mobility. We also face huge challenges on climate change and, with our ageing population, on demographics. Those are the principles that we should be addressing and the big goals that we should be trying to deal with.

On free eye checks, for example, there was a report by the Association of Optometrists—one might say that they would say this anyway, but the report includes some excellent figures—suggesting that the cost of poor-sightedness is around £2 billion a year. Free eye checks cost around £30 million, but the return is in the order of £400 million because there are an extra 300,000 eye tests a year. That is a good thing to have. That is the wider benefit of preventive health; the principle there is about preventive health rather than universalism as the policy helps us to deal with a greater goal.

On life chances, the tax thresholds that we are changing at Westminster are taking a whole load of people who are on lower incomes scales out of tax altogether. That is a good thing. It is a social good to try to improve social mobility.

On nursery education for two-year-olds, we are failing miserably here in Scotland. In England, 40 per cent of two-year-olds receive nursery education support whereas in Scotland only 1 per

cent do. In England, the most disadvantaged receive support, whereas only 1 per cent do so up here. I want us to do more, and I welcome Nicola Sturgeon's remarks on that last week.

Look also at the pupil premium that we are introducing down south, which is based on free school meal entitlement. A whole load of people from disadvantaged backgrounds are getting extra support, which improves their life chances.

On climate change, the insulation programme applies irrespective of income. We have a big challenge on the climate, so that is where the investment should go. It is not just about universalism. In some ways, the debate, although welcome, is actually not about universalism versus not—that is what Jackie Baillie was referring to—but about what other goals we are trying to achieve.

On free personal care—

Linda Fabiani: I am interested in what Willie Rennie is saying. Campbell Christie's report talked about trying to alter the silo mentality, so does the member agree with me that to pick out random statistics, as members of the Labour group do in these debates, is to do down what they themselves are saying? We should be looking at the whole cost to society and the net cost, rather than picking random figures out of the air.

Willie Rennie: I was trying to make an elevated contribution to this debate, but I struggle with interventions like that. I think that all parties are prone to using selective statistics, so we need to be careful when we accuse others of doing that.

Margo MacDonald: I agree that we should talk about universality as opposed to targeting if we are talking about principles, but if there is an urgency, we must look to see how we can cut our coat according to our cloth. There should not be any disagreements in the chamber over that, but having to choose between elderly people in care and children who need looked after is an odious choice. That is one of the reasons why I will look at getting universality as soon as possible. Incidentally, I will also look at putting a charge on some services that can be recouped through income tax.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Mr Rennie, you have 40 seconds.

Willie Rennie: The member makes a good contribution. I will try to make the rest of my elevated contribution within 40 seconds.

The big problem that I have is with the council tax freeze. I cannot understand how the universalism in that has been dressed up as equity. "The Government Economic Strategy" mentions sustainability, cohesion and solidarity, which are great principles, but I am not sure how

the council tax freeze fits with those. How can Fred Goodwin being given a discount of £3,000 be of benefit to the wider community? I have a big issue with that and I think that we need a debate about that.

Universalism itself is not the principle; the big issue is what benefit we get from the investment that we make.

15:49

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

It is possibly the lowest form of politics to bring another member's family into a debate and use it as an argument.

Hugh Henry rose—

Mark McDonald: No, Mr Henry, you will sit down and you will listen.

To bring Derek Mackay's family into the debate and use it as an argument against him is one of the most despicable things that a politician could do.

Hugh Henry: It is about choice—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mark McDonald: Mr Henry is right that it is about choice, and I want to speak about someone whom I have the right to speak about in relation to choice. I am a member of Aberdeen City Council, which faces tough budget choices. Frankly, I think that the pernicious lie that removing the council tax freeze would have allowed us to simply wish away those tough choices demeans the debate. Those tough choices would have remained. We faced tough choices around our additional support needs and learning disability budgets and we took the decision to make reductions in those knowing that we needed to reshape the services. I have an autistic son, so do not dare tell me that the members of this party do not understand how to make tough choices when family members enter into the frame, Mr Henry.

Allow me to quote from Campbell Christie, because the Labour Party has made it clear that it wants to talk about the Christie commission. In an interview with *Holyrood* magazine, he said:

"People say we can't afford things now but in 1948 we couldn't afford the NHS and the pension schemes but we did it ... The politicians of that era were determined that the supportive community environment should be underpinned by state provision, even in the most difficult of economic situations."

Those of us on the Government benches have chosen our priorities. We set them out to the people in 2011. In many instances, the Labour Party backed us on those priorities either in votes in the chamber or in the priorities in its manifesto. Indeed, a recent visit to the Labour website

showed a list of things such as free prescriptions, free personal care and the council tax freeze as policies that the Labour Party was seeking to advance.

We hear Labour Party politicians quoting Nye Bevan to us, forgetting that Nye Bevan resigned from the Government over the introduction of prescription charges, so free prescriptions are entirely in keeping with the spirit of Nye Bevan and what he wished to espouse.

I mentioned tough choices in Aberdeen. One would think that if the Labour Party was staying true to the mantra that Johann Lamont espoused, the Labour Party in Aberdeen would have joined in the debate and outlined tough choices. Did it at any stage move an alternative budget from opposition? No. Did it at any stage engage in the discussion around the choices that the council had to make? No. Instead, it carped and moaned from the sidelines, because when the going gets tough, the Labour Party gets going.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: As he is one of the main culprits, I give Mr Baker the opportunity to atone for his sins.

Richard Baker: I am happy that we did not proceed with plans for more than £100 million of borrowing for a scheme in the city centre to concrete over Union Terrace gardens. We know that when that is the kind of tough choice that we need to make, we will invest in services and not cut care services in the way that the SNP did when it led the council.

Mark McDonald: That is an interesting comment from Mr Baker, because one of the reasons why we had to make those tough choices was the Labour Party's profligacy when it was the administration. The call comes out from Labour members that they want to have a debate. We need to know Labour's position before we can have a debate. It is not good enough to simply stand up and say that we must have a debate. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Mark McDonald: Johann Lamont began her speech by saying that she did not want to just sit back and criticise the Government. She then spent 14 minutes criticising the Government. We want to know what the Labour Party's position is on these issues. It is not enough to simply stand up and say that we need to discuss whether we can afford to do these things or whether it is right to afford to do these things. This party has laid out its position and said that it believes not only that it can afford to do these things but that it is right to do these things and that it is to the benefit of the Scottish

people to do these things. The Labour Party cannot simply stand up and say, "We need to have a debate, but you'll have to wait until 2015 to know what our position in the debate is going to be, because that is when our commission will report back."

Over the past year, we have heard calls from the Labour Party for an extra £37.8 million for colleges, £100 million for housing, around £0.75 billion to re-regulate buses, £25 million for fuel poverty, £22.1 million for an air route development fund, £10 million for kinship carers, £65.19 million for NHS nurses, £20 million back into the Crown Office, £136.6 million for job creation, £319 million back into the NHS budget, £24,500 to charities, £4.6 million to the video game industry—

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

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

Mark McDonald: To continue, £1 million for the inquiry into the PIP implants, £1 million for a public inquiry into the legionnaire's disease outbreak, £2.4 million to reinstate cuts to drug misuse budgets and £2 million to reinstate the cut to the Scottish Court Service. That is a grand total of £1.5 billion in spending calls in the past year alone from Labour Party members.

Jamie Hepburn: From Jackie Baillie.

Mark McDonald: As my colleague Mr Hepburn says, a large number of those calls came from Jackie Baillie.

Even if we were to take the Labour Party's position on universality to the extreme and cancel all the universal benefits, it would not pay for those spending requirements. Where, exactly, is the tough-choice agenda there?

15:55

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Presiding Officer,

"many people ... have accepted the principle that it is right that those who can afford to pay towards the cost ... should do so ... That must be right when public finances are under such pressure. The expansion of contributions will allow us to target ... assistance at those who need it most".—*[Official Report, Justice Committee, 18 September 2012; c 1717.]*

Those are not the words of Michael Russell in 2006 but the words of Kenny MacAskill to the Justice Committee, only two weeks ago, referring specifically to the Scottish Government's plans to introduce means testing of criminal legal aid.

Until now, Governments of all parties have backed universal access to legal aid in criminal cases, regardless of the resources that are available to the accused. Now the SNP plans to save £10 million, in real terms, from the legal aid

budget over the next two years, and it is using the Scottish Civil Justice Council and Criminal Legal Assistance Bill to end that universal entitlement.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):

Is the member aware that the Labour members on the Justice Committee agreed that in principle, and that it was included in the report yesterday?

Lewis Macdonald: Absolutely. We completely support the principle behind that.

Let us remember that the proposal is not a means test only for those who are guilty of crimes; accused persons have been offered no way to recover their legal costs after the event, even if they are acquitted. Nor is it a means test that is targeted only at those who are well off. Limits on legal aid kick in at a disposable income level of only £68 a week, and there is to be no help at all for those with a disposable weekly income of more than £222.

As Mr Finnie has said, we agree that it is hard to justify universal access to criminal legal aid in such financially tough times. I suspect that we will oppose some aspects of the Government's plans, but we will support the principle that those who can afford to make a contribution should be required to do so. That principle could equally be applied to other universal benefits too.

There are plenty of good things that could be done with the resources that have been saved by cuts in legal aid. Scotland's courts face a cut in real terms from the SNP Government of nearly £11 million over the next two years. Proposals to close a series of local courts are currently out for consultation. Staff numbers in the Procurator Fiscal Service have fallen by 8 per cent in a single year.

Last week, we debated the reforms to Scotland's criminal justice system that were proposed by Lord Carloway. He proposed that corroboration should no longer be required for a case to proceed in the criminal courts. The evidence from the Crown Office is that many more cases would come before the courts each year as a result. The Lord Advocate says that a change in the law would also allow hundreds of rape cases that have not been proceeded with due to a lack of corroboration to be looked at again. Many more new cases will be brought to court each year, as well as a backlog of cold cases.

If millions of pounds are to be saved in criminal legal aid and the Scottish Government wants to pursue radical changes in the legal system, it could choose to direct extra resources into Scotland's courts and fiscal services. However, that is not what the SNP proposes to do. It will make savings from means testing one formerly universal benefit, but it wants to take that money out of the justice system to fund all the other

universal benefits that it lacks the political courage to review.

The same situation applies in relation to headline targets. When the SNP promised to deliver 1,000 extra police officers, it forgot to say that all those officers and more would end up doing jobs that were previously done by civilian staff. Almost 1,000 civilian jobs have already gone in the past couple of years, according to the Government's figures, but that is only a small part of the devastating cuts to Scotland's police service that Kenny MacAskill has in store. Scotland's new chief constable, Stephen House, let the cat out of the bag last week when he confirmed that "many, many hundreds" more jobs are set to go.

At the weekend, we learned about the detail of the Government's secret plans. Some £11.2 million is to be spent on dumping 550 civilian staff even before the new police force comes into being and another £74.3 million is to be spent on dumping thousands more in the three years after that. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will still not take responsibility for the thousands of jobs of loyal public servants that he intends to axe.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Lewis Macdonald: No, thank you.

A Scottish Government spokesman told the *Sunday Herald* this weekend that

"it will be for the new chief constable and the Scottish Police Authority to determine the balance between police officers and police staff in the new service."

No doubt he will soon be telling us that large-scale privatisation in the police service is also

"an operational matter for the chief constable."

I do not imagine that Stephen House believes any of that, and David O'Connor of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents is clearly none too impressed either. They both know that

"the balance between police officers and police staff"

has already been determined by Kenny MacAskill, because the SNP will insist on keeping its headline figure of 17,230 warrant-holding police officers, even though hundreds and soon thousands of those officers will be turned into back-room bobbies doing civilian jobs.

Just as the SNP will not face the conflict between law reform and courtroom closures, so it hides from the damage that it is doing to Scotland's police service. It is not just about how many police officers we have; it is about what they do when they get to work. Most people in the service know that, and ministers must surely know it too. It is only when the SNP faces up to those issues honestly that it can make a real contribution to the debate on the future of Scotland's police.

16:01

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am pleased to have been called to speak in this fairly lively debate on Scotland's future. Of course, all the work that we do in the Parliament, as we scrutinise legislation and deal with other matters that are brought before us, is to consider in the various sectors of economic life that we have a say over the kind of Scotland that we wish to see in the future. To try to condense how I see Scotland's future into a six-minute speech is therefore not without its challenges, so I will focus my remarks on certain issues only.

I stress at the outset that for Scotland to prosper we cannot continue to operate with one hand tied behind our back. That is simply an illogical position for any nation to be in. In order to transform our country and to see real social justice here, we need the powers that are necessary for doing the job—that is, we need the powers of an independent country.

Claudia Beamish: Will the member take an intervention?

Annabelle Ewing: I want to make progress.

It is only with those powers that we can gain control over all our resources and make use of them in accordance with our country's priorities.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Annabelle Ewing: I want to make progress.

It is only with the powers of independence that we can rid ourselves of the obscenity of spending billions and billions of pounds on weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde, which of course Labour seems to be keen to do.

Jackie Baillie: Normally, the choice is posited as Trident or schools and hospitals. Is it not the case that the SNP's policy is that if Trident is cancelled, all the money goes into defence spending?

Annabelle Ewing: Jackie Baillie may not want to hear the answer that I will give, which is that, as an independent country, we could choose not to spend billions and billions of pounds on the obscenity of nuclear weapons and could, for example, spend that money on tackling child poverty and on securing a first-class education service and health service in our country. Those are the kind of choices that the people of Scotland wish to make and which I believe they will make in 2014, even if at that stage we have still not heard from the Labour leader as to whether she supports the renewal of Trident.

As an independent nation, we could make our country the prosperous country that it should be, given the vast natural resources that we have at

our disposal. What could be more important than the health and wellbeing of our people and the education of future generations? It saddens me therefore to see the Labour Party moving away from the idea of universal good in society, which stems from the centuries-old tradition in Scotland of the common weal, which is particularly important at this time of economic difficulty for so many of our fellow citizens. Indeed, in times of such difficulty, surely it is even more important that the common bonds of society and humanity that link all of us are reflected in the economic choices that we make. That is why the social wage that the SNP Government secured delivers some protection to households across Scotland in the face of the massive Tory cuts to public spending.

Johann Lamont: Does the member think that it is part of the common weal to deny people with learning disabilities the opportunity to learn to live independently by attending college, which was a cornerstone of the quiet revolution that emptied our long-stay hospitals and gave people dignity and the ability to achieve their potential? The member's Government is cutting those places in further education right now.

Annabelle Ewing: I have two things to say to the Labour leader in Scotland, who still has not taken the opportunity to clarify whether she supports the replacement of Trident. First, Labour in Scotland prefers Tory rule over welfare to home rule. Secondly, we in the SNP do not need to take any lessons from Labour, the party that abolished the 10p tax rate, on how to improve the lives of our citizens.

The degree of economic protection that the social wage affords inspires the hope, which all of us in society need, that a better day is coming. We need that hope so that we can work together as a nation, with the common weal in mind, to make progress towards a better and more just society. How on earth would reintroducing a tax on the sick help our country to move forwards? As we have heard, until the SNP Government abolished prescription charges, about 600,000 people in Scotland with an income of less than £16,000 were charged for prescriptions when they became ill. How on earth does the Labour Party think that punishing those people by reintroducing prescription charges will improve their lives? How dare the Labour Party say that those citizens are getting something for nothing.

To take Labour's new opposition to universality to its logical conclusion, where would the line be drawn? Will we be charged for going to see the doctor or for having operations or stays in hospital? What is the cost of the proposed means testing system? It has to be remembered that the Labour Party has form on the issue because, in the Westminster Parliament, it voted for foundation

hospitals, which have paved the way for the privatisation of the health service south of the border.

The way forward for Scotland is to take charge of our affairs and to secure the normal powers of an independent country to transform our country and see real social justice. Roll on the 2014 yes vote in the referendum.

16:07

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the debate because—apart from the genuine interest in the Labour Party's policy repositioning—it is, as Hugh Henry alluded to, about the services that the state should and should not be in charge of. Therefore, the debate is very much about the extent of the burden that we expect our taxpayers to bear. As Willie Rennie rightly said, Labour has paid heed to the central themes of the Christie and Beveridge reports plus the utterances of the many people in the business and civic communities across Scotland who have warned that the current universal benefits payments are simply not sustainable unless there is an increase in overall tax receipts in Scotland or significant reductions in other areas of public spending. All that comes at a time when there are concerns about the bloated size of the public sector in Scotland.

So let me say why, in the context of discussing universal benefits, there is a specific debate to be had about higher education, and why we decided some time ago that there should in Scotland be a graduate contribution to increase our universities' income. First, we studied at length the evidence that was provided to us by senior figures such as Andrew Cubie, Stewart Sutherland and Gavin McCrone, and by groups such as the Confederation of British Industry, Universities Scotland and Scotland's Colleges—individuals and groups that have spent much of their working lives examining the effects of policy decisions on our higher and further education sectors.

Jamie Hepburn: To pick up on the point about the effect of policy changes, why is it that application rates to English universities have plummeted by 8.6 per cent, while in Scotland, where tuition is free, application rates have remained steady?

Liz Smith: That is not true of people from less well-off backgrounds.

We examined higher education structures in other countries, with two specific things in mind. First, the maintenance and enhancement of the academic excellence of our Scottish institutions and secondly, our ensuring that they remain world-class institutions when set against the highly competitive global community and the premise

that has been part of every Government strategy—Westminster or Scottish Governments—that it is a good thing to have more people at university.

We argued then, and continue to argue, that public funding of our universities is not sustainable in the longer run if we are to achieve both those aims without also damaging other key public spending priorities. That is why, like the experts that I have mentioned, we think that there should be the means to secure additional income for our universities, particularly in the light of the overwhelming evidence—some of which was given to the Education and Culture Committee in the past two weeks—that a sizeable funding gap exists between north and south of the border. That gap will get bigger, especially if we see a trend where there are more Scotland-domiciled students, and European Union students are coming to Scotland at a faster rate than students from the rest of the UK or the international community, and additional income is required because that burden falls on the taxpayer.

There are other considerations. University education provides both public and private benefits, which is why a balance should be maintained in funding. Twenty per cent of our population remains functionally illiterate or innumerate; we therefore made the judgment that that group deserves greater priority within education spending. A graduate contribution has, in other countries, a history of providing more bursary support.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Liz Smith: I will not at the moment, thank you.

There is also the need to ensure that Scottish universities continue to punch well above their weight when it comes to research funding and the development of knowledge exchange. Members should make no mistake about the competitive edge that accrues and the extent of the finance that we need to do just that—a point that was made clearly at recent meetings of the cross-party group on colleges and universities.

There is also an inherent discrimination in the Scottish Government's higher education funding policy: discrimination between those who pay fees and those who do not, for the exact same course. That makes a mockery of the SNP's claim that university entrance is based only on the ability to learn and not on the ability to pay. There is also the on-going anomaly for EU students who, by virtue of EU law, come here free of charge. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning may have partially solved the Irish anomaly, but he cannot solve the EU anomaly because, by law, that cannot be done, so when he

makes that claim, he is grasping thin air, rather than the thistle.

The SNP blandly argues that none of that matters, and that it is all about numbers, but at what price to our colleges, to the competitiveness of our world class institutions, to their staff, their research funding and their ability to stay ahead of the game for decades into the future? That is why we made the choice to support a graduate contribution.

Gavin Brown eloquently set out why we have major differences with Labour and why Johann Lamont need not get too worried about becoming the Tory poster girl just yet, but there is one thing on which we certainly agree with Labour—we need an honest debate. We will advance that debate.

16:13

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): There have been times in my political life when I did not know whether to laugh or cry. Last week's announcement by new new Labour was one of those moments. Whoever would have imagined that new Labour could out-Tory the Tories? Even Margaret Thatcher had more sense than to say that

"Scotland cannot be the only 'something for nothing' country in the world"

Sadly, that was not the case for the new Labour Party.

Let me tell Labour a few things. Whatever we decide to do with our money is for us to decide, particularly because the money that we are talking about is ours—not just some of it, but all of it. In fact, what we get to spend is less than what we contribute—Scotland subsidises others by paying in more than we receive—and the way that Labour articulated its "something for nothing" announcement smacks of the "subsidised Scotland" fear strategy that has persisted from the Labour Party and its fellow unionist parties for years.

Mary Scanlon: Will the member give way?

Gil Paterson: I will not give way at the moment.

All that is designed to undermine the self-confidence and self-belief of the people of Scotland.

Then there are the specifics of what Labour promotes. For instance, identification of those who qualify for free prescriptions will result in the introduction of means testing—the wrecker of self-respect and self-confidence. I wonder whether any of the people who are responsible for the proposal have ever been on the receiving end of means

testing. I will tell members about it first hand, having been forced to take handouts at school.

As a young child, the humiliation that I experienced, and the jibes and bullying that went with it, were utterly soul destroying—so much so that often I preferred to go hungry rather than be hit with the stigma surrounding handouts. Of course, Labour suggests that the reason for the proposal is a shortage of cash and says that some people who are well off enough to pay benefit from free prescriptions, but is happy to put those who are genuinely in need through the misery of means testing. Its reasoning does not stand up to scrutiny; its proposal would cost more in bureaucracy than it costs to provide free prescriptions for all our people.

Let us look more closely at the impact that charging for prescriptions would have on the general population. When I was taking evidence during the previous session of Parliament for my member's bill, the Palliative Care (Scotland) Bill, I visited hospitals, hospices, care homes and many other institutions, and talked to doctors, nurses, patients, family members and friends. I sought views about the desirability of such a bill for people who are at the end of their lives.

On one occasion, I spoke to a gentleman who described his personal journey and how life could have been made a bit easier for him and his family. He explained that he had been very unwell and off work. After a while, his condition improved enough for him to return to work. As he was earning money, he now had to pay for his prescriptions which—if my memory serves me well—consisted of five items. He informed me that he could afford only three or four items. His doctor had said that he needed to take the full prescription in order to advance his recovery, but because he could not afford it, he effectively made himself sicker. We do not know whether he would have lived longer had he been able to take the full prescription.

If that gentleman had had access to free prescriptions, how much would it have cost the taxpayer in real terms? I suspect that the cost would have been a lot less because, instead, he had to go through sessions of acute care, which is—as we all know—far more expensive and more stressful for patients and their families. I am sure that all members of Parliament have had constituents who have been in similar situations. We should honour our commitment to ensuring that our people live and die with dignity. Free prescriptions for all, regardless of income, lives up to that commitment.

In the manner in which they follow their leader—I do not mean Johann Lamont, but their real leader Ed Miliband, who is abandoning those who are least able to defend themselves in order to play to

the south-east of England—Labour members should hang their heads in shame for that betrayal and should know that the rightward shift of the Labour Party is not yet complete. London institutions and policy makers are calling for public sector wages to be capped in the regions in order to subsidise further those in the south-east. Tory MPs are clamouring to outflank the Labour Party and are making the divided United Kingdom even more divided than it is now.

What that means is that those who live in the leafy suburbs of London, who are in secure jobs that have been created by the Government, in an area that is already oversubsidised, will benefit more, while the rest suffer. Once they retire, many of them will cash in their subsidy bonuses and head for the poorer regions, where they will outbid the local inhabitants for housing.

I support the Government's amendment.

16:19

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I have always thought that the Deputy First Minister is a superb debater and today she spoke with her usual forcefulness and style, but her speech—as were those of her colleagues—was constructed from building blocks of fantasy: fantasy about Labour's position on these matters; fantasy about the world of limitless resources that she would rather have than the world of declining resources that we live in; and fantasy about Scandinavian welfare with Romney-type tax cuts, which is her prospectus for an independent Scotland.

The first mistake about Labour that she made was to say that we broke our promise on the council tax. We made it absolutely clear in the run-up to the election 18 months ago that we supported the council tax freeze for two years. As far as I know, this is the second year of the parliamentary session, so let us hear no more such accusations.

The second mistake about Labour that she made—one that was also made by all the other SNP speakers—was to say that we are against universal provision. Of course we are not. We created the welfare state, but the welfare state has always been a combination of universal and targeted provision, and the principle of universality has always been applied on a case-by-case basis.

Mark McDonald: Mr Chisholm might not wish to hear this, but I have had a great deal of respect for him as a politician ever since he resigned from Tony Blair's Government over a cut to benefits for single parents. Should those same single parents be forced to go through the ignominy of means testing for some of the benefits that this Government is providing to them for free?

Malcolm Chisholm: If Mark McDonald had thought before he made that intervention, he would have realised that single parents benefited very greatly from the measures that the Labour Government introduced in a targeted way through tax credits and childcare tax credits.

I think that, in their heart of hearts, Scottish Government ministers also believe in a mixture of universal and targeted provision. I heard rather a good speech from Derek Mackay at the early years conference on Monday. I wrote down some of the phrases that he uttered during that speech, because I thought that they were striking: "sometimes universal"; "sometimes targeted"; "just evidence that". I wrote them down because we will adopt precisely such an approach in our review. Alex Neil came to exactly the same conclusion a couple years ago in relation to the central heating programme, when he changed the universal provision that we introduced and made it targeted, and I do not criticise him for doing so.

For the avoidance of doubt, we will consider, openly and transparently, contentious issues such as the continuation of universal entitlement, as Campbell Christie urged us to do, and in doing so we will avoid the polarised terms that he warned against, and which we have heard in spades from the SNP this afternoon. The SNP is in denial about the real world of political choices and is failing to recognise that every specific decision has an opportunity cost. That is a central rule of politics, especially at a time when budgets are going in one direction and demographics in the opposite.

None of the universal entitlements that are being discussed today was a linchpin of the post-war welfare state in the way that the NHS is—which is not to say that they are not desirable or that I do not have a particular personal commitment to some of them, such as free personal care. That will not surprise people, given that I chaired the care development group and introduced the legislation. However, I fully accept that all that must be reviewed. As we look around Scotland today, many other desirable objectives are before us.

Patrick Harvie: I am very grateful to Malcolm Chisholm for giving way. He said clearly that he supports universalism when the evidence shows that it is beneficial, but not on the basis of how much money is in the budget, so will the Labour review look not just at shifting away from universalism, but at shifting towards progressive revenue raising?

Malcolm Chisholm: The answer to that last bit is obviously yes, but it is still a flight from the real world to say that we cannot take account of the overall budget that we have. To do so is to engage in more fantasy politics. We might wish that we had more resources, and the SNP might tell us—

although we do not believe it—that it would have limitless resources in an independent Scotland, but at the moment we must deal with the resources that we have.

As I was saying before Patrick Harvie's intervention, there are many other desirable objectives that I am sure many members of the Parliament share, such as the new ambitions that we have on the early-years agenda, which has grown in providence over the past few years; I welcome that.

Other desirable objectives include the abolition of child poverty, ending homelessness, introducing the living wage, and providing services to the most disadvantaged in our communities and giving them the opportunities that others have but which they do not. Politics is about making hard choices between competing desirable objectives in the light of the available resources. That is the real situation that we confront. It is not the case that some of the entitlements that we are discussing today are undesirable—for goodness' sake, we introduced most of them when we were in Government. Of course they are desirable, but everything is relative.

We have heard from members on the Labour benches, led by Johann Lamont, of all the problems that we have in our disadvantaged communities and more generally. It is a matter of weighing up the competing desirable objectives and deciding which are most desirable for us within the current financial situation. We have taken that ground-breaking step: it is time that others moved on and took the same step.

16:26

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): We in the SNP believe that access to education should not be based on the ability to pay, and we believe that healthcare should be free at the point of need. We believe in protecting hard-pressed family budgets in a time of recession, and we believe that older people should be treated with dignity and respect and be able to enjoy an independent old age. Sadly, Labour no longer appears to believe the same. Murdo Fraser summed it up last week, when he said that it was

“Good to see Johann warming to Tory ideas.”

In two years, Scots will not only have the choice to vote in a referendum to re-establish Scotland as an independent nation, but will face a stark choice regarding the kind of society that they wish to see. I am therefore pleased that we have had a chance to explore that today and am grateful to the Labour Party for lodging its motion—even if I find it ironic that its members wish to debate the long-term future of our nation when those political chameleons seem to be incapable of maintaining

a policy position on anything for more than a few short months.

The comments that were made by Johann Lamont, which I presume bounced her party—certainly, the Scottish Trades Union Congress knew nothing about it—were nothing short of remarkable. They show a Labour Party that is long bereft of any policies or ideas. I understand that this summer its members went round to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations to ask whether it had any.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Kenneth Gibson: I will let Mr Gray in at some point.

The only policy that Labour had at the last election was to steal popular SNP policies—it had opposed them, then it pinched them at the election, and then it discarded them. The Labour Party is now taking a huge leap to the right by seeking to remove popular, effective, idealistic and fair universal benefits from the people of Scotland during the harshest economic recession in living memory. It beggars belief, to be frank.

Labour and the Conservatives seem to have ruled out economic growth as a potential route out of the mire that we are currently in, which shows that they are utterly bereft of policies. Cut, cut, cut is all they have to offer. It appears that 13 years of Blair and Brown followed by a recent bed-in with the Tories has transformed an increasingly opportunistic and posturing Labour Party beyond recognition.

Our record of delivering equality, opportunity, independent living, dignity and respect to the people of Scotland speaks for itself. We are proud to defend our record on the provision of universal benefits.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Kenneth Gibson: It will not be long until I let in members—although not Mr Findlay, after his embarrassing contribution earlier.

Instead of seeking to protect benefits such as the free bus pass, free higher education, free personal care for the elderly, free prescriptions and the council tax freeze, Johann Lamont and her party want to limit access or scrap them altogether. How many of the 1.24 million people who have free bus passes will lose them? The Labour Party says that we have to look at reality—of course we have to look at reality. However, it is funny that reality did not seem to come into the equation when we discussed budgets last year when—as my colleague Mark McDonald pointed out—every single Labour front bencher called for money for every single portfolio. We knew that Alistair Darling said that cuts under Labour would

have to be “deeper and tougher” than they were under Margaret Thatcher. Only this week, Ed Balls, a kind of crown prince in waiting, said on behalf of Johann’s master, Ed Miliband, that Labour would have to be “ruthless” with cuts.

Michael McMahon: Will the member give way?

Kenneth Gibson: I will take an intervention from Mr Gray in a second or two, because he was first to try to intervene. I am just over halfway through my speech.

The apparent confusion of Labour knows no bounds. Yesterday, Ed Miliband simply rehashed the 1995 Tony Blair speech on one nation—it was plagiarised, as members will see if they read today’s *Independent*.

I will take an intervention from Mr Gray, who was up after 30 seconds.

Iain Gray: The moment for the intervention that I intended to make has passed, but I am prompted to ask whether, given that the SNP Government has cut 30,000 public sector workers out of the workforce in Scotland and its cuts are deeper than George Osborne’s, the SNP Government is the most ruthless cutter on these islands.

Kenneth Gibson: That is preposterous. The workforce has not shrunk by 30,000 and jobs have gone through wastage, not through compulsory redundancies—unlike the situation in some Labour councils.

Councillor Gordon Matheson bragged that Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council was the first to introduce a council tax freeze. He featured a five-year council tax freeze as his number 1 priority. However, Johann Lamont says that that is not affordable. Hugh Henry said, “Oh, but the SNP would force us to do it.” I am sorry, Mr Henry, but the Scottish Government’s remit extends only to 2016, whereas Gordon Matheson’s runs until 2017. Either Labour thinks that we will win again in 2016 in an independent Scottish Parliament or it is being cynical, as it has been in recent months.

Labour MSPs stood on a manifesto that told us that concessionary bus passes and police numbers would be protected.

Michael McMahon: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final minute.

Kenneth Gibson: The majority of Labour MSPs, and the party nationally, signed a pledge against that. I am talking about people like Jenny Marra, Iain Gray and Johann Lamont. That is a betrayal of Labour’s manifesto commitments.

Michael McMahon: Will the member give way?

Kenneth Gibson: You have already been told that I am in my final minute, Michael, so sit down.

It is ironic that—as John Mason will remember—Labour, as part of its usual “Do anything to get elected, including frightening old people” by-election misinformation campaign four years ago in Glasgow East, claimed that the SNP would abolish pensioners’ bus passes. Now we hear from Labour that “nothing is off the table”. Labour no longer seems to understand what it stands for.

Johann Lamont has been praised, mainly by the *Daily Record* and the *Daily Mail*, for being brave in making her announcement, but there is no bravery in refusing to tell people which benefits would be removed and who would suffer if Labour took office, and there is no bravery in picking on the weakest people in our society. I support the amendment in the cabinet secretary’s name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Patrick Harvie. I am sad to say that he can have only two minutes.

16:32

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I agree with the central premise that the Labour Party is putting forward, which is that it is not possible to show a commitment to a series of universal benefits and to high-quality public services while showing an instinct to cut every tax—in short, as Johann Lamont put it, a commitment to Scandinavian levels of public service and United States levels of tax.

Of course I agree with that. I used exactly that phrase before the local government elections this year and before the Holyrood election last year. I know better than most members do how hard it is to win people’s votes when we are being honest about that before an election, instead of saying it after an election.

I welcome the call for an open and honest debate, which has been echoed by many Labour members. But then what? After calling for a debate, politicians have to say where they stand in the debate. It took until Malcolm Chisholm’s speech towards the end of the debate for a Labour member even to acknowledge that revenue raising needs to play a role in the debate.

I agree with Annabelle Ewing about cancelling Trident, but I have listened to so many excellent, barnstorming lefty speeches about cancelling Trident that I have heard the money being spent a thousand times. It will not pay for everything. If Annabelle Ewing meant what she said, she must vote against Angus Robertson’s resolution on a commitment to spend £2.5 billion in Scotland—that is, 2 per cent of our gross domestic product—on the military.

We talk about universal benefits and free services, but none of that is free. It is a question of what we choose to pay for collectively. We choose to pay for things collectively because we are better off collectively if we do so. However, such services must be paid for on that collective basis. If this is a real debate, I call on both sides of it to agree that the one thing that we must do in this parliamentary session is to free the hand of local government to raise the revenue that it needs in progressive ways, as soon as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sad to be able to give Stewart Stevenson only two minutes, too.

16:34

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Malcolm Chisholm, at least, will be pleased if my speech is made of straw. However, it will be made entirely of Labour's straw.

I have with me a number of Labour leaflets. One central Labour leaflet says, "Freeze council tax"; it does not say, "Freeze council tax for two years", just "Freeze council tax". A leaflet from Iain Gray talks about freezing council tax for two years. One Richard Simpson leaflet says,

"Keep free bus passes for the over 60s"

while another says,

"Scottish Labour will not introduce tuition fees to pay for higher education."

A leaflet from Cathy Peattie mentions a

"Council tax freeze to help household bills"

but says nothing about two years, and another of her leaflets says:

"Labour delivered Scotland-wide ... travel for older people and introduced a young persons concessionary travel scheme. Buses are a lifeline for many."

A central Labour leaflet mentions "no university tuition fees"; an Allan Wilson leaflet says, "Freeze council tax"; a Colin Davidson leaflet says, "Freeze council tax"; and a Willie Scobie leaflet says, "Freeze council tax".

Members: Who?

Stewart Stevenson: He was one of Labour's candidates. I am glad to be able to enlighten Labour on such a wide range of subjects.

However, Labour still has some decent caring people. Carwyn Jones said,

"We're not going to change the policy on free prescriptions. We can afford it",

and pointed out,

"If we say that people have to start paying for their medicine where does it end?"

I want to finish with Omar Khayyam.

"Each Morn a thousand Roses bring, you say:
Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?
And this first Summer month that brings the Rose
Shall take Miliband and Lamont away."

16:36

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I wonder whether Stewart Stevenson, in his collection of election leaflets, has any of the SNP leaflets promising to cut class sizes to 18 in primaries 1 to 3, pay off the debts of every graduate in Scotland and replace student loans with student grants. What happened to those leaflets?

I have two astonishing revelations, the first of which is that I agree with most of what Patrick Harvie said. An even more astonishing revelation came earlier in the debate when we heard something that none of us thought we would ever hear in the chamber—Michael Russell saying he was wrong. The manager of Bargain Books will be rubbing his hands at the prospect of the few remaining dusty copies of "Grasping the Thistle" flying off the shelves, such is the resurgent interest that has been created by Johann Lamont. I am sure that Mr Russell is looking forward to the royalties.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I hope that Mr Findlay's intervention will be better than his earlier one.

Neil Findlay: I, too, have been boosting the circulation of Mr Russell's book. Last week, I purchased it with my own money from an online retailer. It was the best 16p I have ever spent.

Murdo Fraser: I advise Mr Findlay to be more careful with his money in future.

I welcome the debate. Labour might be late to the table in highlighting these concerns, but its new focus is timely and welcome. I should also say that in much of this debate SNP members' speeches have been based on a false premise. This is not about the principle of universality versus means testing. As Hugh Henry fairly pointed out, the SNP is entirely happy to support means testing in a whole range of areas and has not proposed any changes in that respect.

SNP members beginning with Nicola Sturgeon and ending with Kenny Gibson said time and time again that the NHS should provide everything for free, but even they must know that that is patent nonsense. As has been pointed out, NHS patients contribute to the cost of their dental treatment and under the SNP are subject to a means test. With regard to optical care, eye tests are free but patients who need glasses or contact lenses have to pay for them and, again under the SNP, are

subject to a means test. It is a similar story with hearing aids, which are also subject to a means test under the SNP. The list goes on.

Over the past 11 years, I have heard not one SNP member say that all those services should be provided free of charge. As a result, it is rank hypocrisy and opportunism for SNP members to come along today and try to claim that they are the champions of free universal health provision.

There are no absolutes in the debate. There is no straight choice between universalism and targeted support. There is simply a spectrum, as Jackie Baillie, Willie Rennie, Malcolm Chisholm and other members pointed out. Where we place ourselves on that spectrum depends as much on financial and economic pressures as it does on great points of principle.

The SNP should abandon its conceit and accept that it has set up a false debate. After all, back in 2010, its own independent budget review report—written by none other than the First Minister's handpicked chief economic adviser, Crawford Beveridge—raised serious questions about the affordability of certain universal benefits. It concluded:

"The Panel believes that the continuing provision of a range of universal services on the same basis as at present is unlikely to be affordable in the face of the projected financial challenges. Alternative approaches should, therefore, be considered as a matter of urgency."

Back in 2010—two years ago—the SNP's chief economic adviser was saying:

"Alternative approaches should ... be considered as a matter of urgency",

and it is to the SNP's shame that it has done nothing to address those serious questions in the meantime and, instead, continues to bang on about budget cuts.

The chief economic adviser to the SNP is not alone in saying that. An Age Scotland report written by Professor Charlie Jeffery questioned whether it was right that all people over 60, including wealthy ones, would get concessionary bus travel when it meant that other people would have to pay more for demand-responsive transport. It also asked:

"If it is legitimate to target policies in some areas, like fuel poverty, onto the most disadvantaged, why is it not in other areas?"

On university funding, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce proposed a graduate contribution, as did the SNP's favourite think tank Reform Scotland. Audit Scotland questioned the long-term affordability of a range of policies, including free prescriptions, free eye tests and concessionary travel. Even the British Medical Association Scotland called for an honest and open debate about what we can or cannot afford in the NHS.

A cloud of witnesses testifies to the fact that there is a serious problem, and that problem will exist whatever constitutional arrangement exists in Scotland post 2014.

There is a consequence to the choices that the SNP makes, because providing benefits to all whether they are in need of them or not simply means that there is less money to spend elsewhere. To maintain university funding, colleges' budgets have been slashed when more and more young people need to access training courses. The housing budget has been slashed when it could be helping the construction sector.

Margo MacDonald: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: I think that I am in my last minute.

There is rationing in the NHS—for example, in access to in vitro fertilisation treatment or the supply of orthodontic treatment to children—as a consequence of giving free prescriptions to all. There are resources that could be better spent.

The debate is important and needs to be properly informed. Gavin Brown said that we need to have the information about the challenges that are ahead. We need the information to inform the debate, and I am delighted to support his amendment.

16:42

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Willie Rennie made an interesting speech. He said that he was trying to make an elevated contribution to the debate, and he succeeded in part in doing so. He focused on a point with which I very much agree, which is that the purpose of budgeting public expenditure is to determine what impact the expenditure makes and what outcomes it achieves.

That is where Murdo Fraser is completely and utterly wrong in what he just said about the housing budget. The point that I have laboured in the budget debates in the Parliament is that, for less money, this Administration has been able to build more houses. I would have thought that the Conservatives would have taken that seriously. Is it not a welcome achievement in the Administration's use of public money at a time of enormous public spending pressure to deliver better outcomes by constructing more homes for the people of our country? That is what we are doing in taking forward the country's public spending priorities.

Gavin Brown: If the cabinet secretary can make the money go further, why does he restrict the number of homes that he builds?

John Swinney: I am afraid that I do not completely follow that point. I am trying to say to Gavin Brown that, by using a smaller amount of money, we are able to achieve—

Gavin Brown: Build more homes.

John Swinney: It takes me to point out to Mr Brown that there is a finite sum of money because of the cuts from the Conservative Government in London.

Murdo Fraser is also wrong to say that we have done nothing to address the issues. I completely and utterly disagree with the Labour Party's statement that nothing has been done to address the difficult public spending issues that we face.

The Labour Party has come to the debate many years too late and long after the issues emerged. Every year we have a debate in this Parliament about the budget. I am immersed in that debate now and I have been immersed in every debate since 2007. Throughout the period of my stewardship of the public finances, I have engaged with other parties about how we should shape the Scottish Government's priorities to try to ensure that we deliver on the outcomes that Mr Rennie talked about.

On occasions I have been able to come to agreements with the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Greens and my dear friend in the back row, Margo MacDonald. However, only once have I managed to come to an agreement with the Labour Party on the contents of the budget, and that happened only because the Labour Party voted against my budget one week and for the same budget a week later. The only circumstances in which I could get agreement with the Labour Party was when it was in a state of total shambolic chaos—exactly the state that it has been in since a week ago yesterday.

If I look at the issues that I was wrestling with about the budget and my agreement with the Labour Party—

Iain Gray: I remember that budget debate. I think that it was the Scottish Government that was in a state of complete and utter shambles at that point. I have trouble remembering further back these days, so perhaps Mr Swinney will remind me of how many budget amendment suggestions he made during eight years in opposition. I think that the answer is one.

John Swinney: I am not sure that Iain Gray speaks from a position of strength about budget management on behalf of the Opposition.

Mr Gray was involved in many of the discussions between 2007 and 2011. Let me remind him that not once, in that whole period or since, has the Labour Party asked me to give more money to local government. The Labour

Party's clarion call in this debate is that local government has somehow taken the brunt of the Government's financial decisions, but on no occasion has the Labour Party exercised the influence that it could have. When the SNP was in a minority and the Labour Party could have exercised enormous control over my decisions, it never darkened my door to ask for more money for local government.

Johann Lamont: John Swinney could perhaps address what we are discussing in the debate. In 2010, he said that the Beveridge report would be a critical platform to build consensus within the Parliament and across Scotland about how we deal with the pressures on our finances. When I raised those issues, the Deputy First Minister impugned my motives and said, "nothing will change."

When will John Swinney build consensus by having a serious debate about what Beveridge and Christie said?

John Swinney: I do not think that Johann Lamont is in any position to talk about anybody impugning anybody's motives when she is sitting behind Hugh Henry, given his contribution to the debate this afternoon.

Hugh Henry: The issue is that Derek Mackay voted to give only a few schools free school meals in early primary and he as a parent benefited financially. He voted not to give universal entitlement, but he voted to make disabled adults pay for their transport to day centres.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We have a point of order, Mr Henry. Will you resume your seat?

Fiona McLeod: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Under rule 7.3 of the standing orders, could it possibly be that Mr Henry is still refusing to conduct himself

"in a courteous and respectful manner"

towards the chamber?

The Presiding Officer: I remind all members that they should be conducting themselves in a courteous and respectful manner.

John Swinney: Mr Mackay was following an agreement between the Government and local authorities in Scotland to support areas of the country that were experiencing the problems of deprivation. I do not see why Hugh Henry has got such an issue with supporting young people who experience deprivation. That makes a mockery of the rubbish that he has been talking all afternoon.

Johann Lamont asked me when I will start to build consensus in Parliament on the issues. I started that debate in 2010 with the Christie commission, which made a number of

recommendations on public sector efficiency, which I accepted; on public sector pay, which I accepted; on the capital programme, which I accepted; and on reforming the public sector, which I accepted. The Christie commission reinforced that work, which encouraged us to focus more on prevention, to which I allocated £500 million, and to increase co-operation and integration in the public services, which is why adult health and social care integration is in our policy programme.

The Labour Party has huge questions to answer about what it will bring to the debate, because it has not told us what it believes. As I have just told Parliament, we as a Government have taken forward a host of reforms as part of our response to the Christie commission.

Jackie Baillie said that we must always be mindful of the long-term sustainability of budgets, because budgets do not always increase. That is wise advice. I wish that the Labour Party had thought about that before it bankrupted this country with private finance initiative contracts that are a burden on the budget that I control.

16:51

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The debate has been an excellent start. Johann Lamont has called time on the SNP's fantasy economics. As an Opposition, our job is to tell it like it is and to bring up the issues that our constituents raise with us day after day. I was out meeting constituents across the road in Dumbiedykes on Friday, and the debate there was more sophisticated than our debate today, because people know that there are tough choices to make.

Our job is to analyse and look at the pressures on the budget and to come up with solutions. The 30,000 people who have lost their jobs since 2008 will not be comforted by the knowledge that Kenny Gibson thinks that they are wastage. What a scandalous comment that was. Last year alone, 14,500 council jobs went.

Kenneth Gibson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. That was a deliberate misrepresentation. I said that jobs had gone because of wastage. People retire and leave—Sarah Boyack knows that fine well.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson, that is not a point of order. Please resume your seat.

Sarah Boyack: I am sure that a reading of the *Official Report* will back up the comments that I just made.

Last week, officers in North Lanarkshire and Glasgow highlighted the possibility of another 2,500 jobs being lost. That will not kick-start our economy or help us to come out of recession.

Labour local authority leaders have made it clear that they are making the toughest decisions for a generation.

Bruce Crawford: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you.

The problem is that we have had five years of an unfunded council tax freeze. We need only look at Professor Bell's comments to the Finance Committee last week to see that we need to take the situation seriously.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: A direct impact is being felt in relation to local government's ability to use its resources to help people to get through the recession from which we are suffering. Local government services face a double whammy—less support from the SNP Government but even greater reliance on it for resources.

That is why our devolution commission will look not just at powers for the Scottish Parliament but at powers for local government, which needs to be treated with respect and to have the opportunity to provide the services for which the public have voted. We did not devolve powers from the British state just to have an increasingly centralised Scottish state.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member is not taking an intervention, Mr Stewart.

Sarah Boyack: I do not know whether colleagues have read John Swinney's letter to local government, which tells us everything that we need to know about the relationship between the SNP and local government and about the partnership that is meant to be in place. The letter says, "We expect you to sign up to the council tax freeze—if you don't, your finances will be clobbered. We expect you to stick to the precise letter on teacher numbers and probationers—and, by the way, don't bother replying unless you refuse our terms." That is written in the letter, which I have highlighted for Mr Swinney.

John Swinney: From Sarah Boyack's objection to the Government trying to sustain the number of teacher places in our schools, I take it that the Labour Party now wants to reduce teacher numbers in Scotland's schools. Is that the point that the Labour Party has reached?

Sarah Boyack: My objections are, first, that teacher numbers have fallen and, secondly, that the cabinet secretary is passing the buck to local authorities for all the difficult decisions that are coming in the budget.

People know what is happening. They know that their care services are being squeezed. Staff are

making 15-minute visits—many are being paid the absolute minimum—and those who are least able to object are suffering. People can see what is happening to their relatives and they want better. Jackie Baillie was absolutely right to raise those issues.

The Government's amendment completely gives the game away. Everything has to be seen through the prism of the referendum and how to win votes for it. The SNP is desperate not to have this debate about the reality that people face today. We need to help people through the recession, but the SNP Government has put local authorities in a financial straitjacket and has wasted precious taxpayers' money—because there is a cost to the underfunded council tax freeze.

Kevin Stewart: Will Ms Boyack give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you.

Only 20 per cent of local government's funding is now raised locally, and 80 per cent of last year's budget cuts were made to local government services. If SNP members do not believe that that is a problem, they need only listen to SNP councils. Perth and Kinross Council is considering closing 10 kids clubs; Clackmannanshire Council plans a £200,000 cut in adult care; Argyll and Bute Council is privatising home care services—

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, let these points be heard in the chamber. Nobody has really talked about the detail of what is happening in our local authorities.

"Efficiencies and reduced staffing numbers can only be achieved by being more focused about what we do and how we do it ... There is simply no prospect of this level of funding gap being met without service provision being affected."

Those are the words of an SNP council.

Nicola Sturgeon: If all that Sarah Boyack says is true, why did Labour promise, five months ago in Glasgow, that its number 1 priority was to continue the council tax freeze for another five years?

Sarah Boyack: It is in the cabinet secretary's letter that if Glasgow City Council puts one penny on its council tax it will lose £70 million. The council knows the cabinet secretary's policy until the next election.

What is the alternative from the SNP? I have not heard one back bencher mention the SNP's hated local income tax, which is meant to be its alternative to the financial straitjacket that local government has been put in. There is a con there as well: the last time that we heard about it, it was

going to be 3p in the pound more, but it actually needed to be 6p more.

By the end of this session of Parliament, the underfunding of the council tax freeze will have put thousands of people on the dole, but it does not need to be like that—that is the point of this debate. We must consider what the choices are in a mature and rational way.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you.

It is difficult to do that in this chamber, but the debate has started. SNP members should know that the debate is now taking place in kitchens and businesses across the country. People are asking to look at the detail of the SNP's policies. Rather than getting better police services throughout the country, we will see a colossal waste of money because the SNP was not prepared to listen to us on local funding for local police services. We have been suggesting alternatives.

Today, however, a local job creation scheme has been delivered: the First Minister has appointed his 13th spin doctor. Again, that tells us everything that we need to know about the Government.

Last week, we had the scandal of the pension deal for the new fire chief, who has been taken on again but with a bigger salary. That is not fair and it is not good economics, never mind the fact that the first announcement that our new national police chief had to make was about losing 3,000 jobs from among the back-room civilians who keep our communities safe. None of that is fair and none of it is good economics. Excuse us if we do our job by pointing out the obvious, but the SNP Government has been getting the big decisions on public finance wrong.

There are young people who are desperate to get skills and there are employers who are desperate to employ young people with skills so that our economy can grow. The SNP told us that no FE courses would be scrapped. However, that is SNP fantasy. Courses have not been stopped, but they are not running this year, so people cannot get on them. That is a cruel sleight of hand for young people who are desperate to get a start in life.

Last year's SNP budget cuts are hitting FE colleges hard. They are hitting the young people who desperately need those skills. The Government is pulling up the ladder on those young people. This is about skills, qualifications and making sure that our economy and our country have a future.

Today, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has blown the whistle on housing. There is absolutely no chance of the SNP

Government meeting its social rented housing targets. That comes after a year in which 12,000 construction workers have lost their jobs. It does not have to be this way.

Many of us in the chamber agree that the Tory Government is cutting too fast and too deep, but instead of protecting people, the SNP Government is making things worse. As Ken Macintosh said two weeks ago, the SNP's proposed budget is not a budget for jobs. That is why Johann Lamont has called for the issues to be properly discussed. We need to call time on fantasy politics.

The Presiding Officer: You need to start winding up, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: On the cost of transport, bus fares are up and services are being cut, yet, astonishingly, this Government has knocked back £350 million from Network Rail to improve our rail infrastructure. You could not make it up—and this is in a time of recession.

We need to face the reality. The Christie commission talks about demographic changes heading our way, but the SNP is too busy nation building to look at what is happening to our nation now. Members should not take my word for it; they should listen to SNP councils and to the late Margaret Ewing. The last time that the Tories were in power, she said:

“we must concentrate help on the groups on whom most concern about risks has focused—the elderly, the sick, the disabled and the very young. No one can disagree with that”.—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 28 October 1993; Vol 230, c 1042.]

That was true in 1993 and it is true today.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We now move to the next item of business, which is consideration of business motion S4M-04379, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for tomorrow.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): In moving the motion, I bring to the chamber's attention the fact that the revision to the business programme for tomorrow will allow for a ministerial statement on the west coast main line.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 4 October 2012—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate:
Employability

and insert

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Ministerial Statement: West Coast Main
Line

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Employability

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Defamation
Bill – UK Legislation—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-04348, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 23 October 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: The Scottish
Greenhouse Gas Emissions Annual Target
Report

followed by Justice Committee Debate: The Role of the
Media in the Criminal Justice System

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 October 2012

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Education and Lifelong Learning

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Winter
Resilience

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 25 October 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Civil Justice Council
and Criminal Legal Assistance (Scotland) Bill

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 30 October 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 31 October 2012

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Finance, Employment and Sustainable
Growth

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Local Government
Finance (Unoccupied Properties etc.)
(Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 1 November 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Population (Statistics) Act 1938 Modifications (Scotland) Order 2012 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to this afternoon's debate on Scotland's future, if the amendment in the name of John Swinney is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Gavin Brown will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-04340.4, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04340, in the name of Johann Lamont, on Scotland's future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)

McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 54, Abstentions 3.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S4M-04340.3 therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-04340, in the name of Johann Lamont, on Scotland's future, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
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 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 54, Abstentions 3.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the clear choice now facing the people of Scotland between managing a declining budget determined by the priorities of a UK Government or choosing a better way in which a Scottish Parliament, elected by the people of Scotland, has access to Scotland's resources in order to ensure a fairer, wealthier and stronger society; recognises the health, societal and economic benefits of the universal provision provided under devolution and rejects the idea that this offers "something for nothing"; welcomes the actions taken by the Scottish Government since 2007 to ensure the sustainability of spending in Scotland, including the focus on preventative spending, reform of public services and the empowerment of communities as set out in the Independent Budget Review and the report of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, and agrees that, in order to ensure that Scotland reaches its full potential, can tackle poverty, protect key public services such as the NHS and deliver a socially just and economically vibrant society, it is necessary for the Scottish Parliament to have the full powers of an independent parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-04350, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Population (Statistics) Act 1938 Modifications (Scotland) Order 2012 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quickly and quietly.

Breast Cancer

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-03421, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on October is breast cancer awareness month. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the important role of the Scottish Government's Detect Cancer Early initiative; notes that the first cancer type to be targeted by this will be breast cancer; understands that 460 women in the NHS Lanarkshire area were diagnosed with the condition in 2010 and that the earlier cancer is detected, the better the chances of successful treatment; welcomes the role that Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October plays in promoting early detection and the work of all cancer charities in raising awareness, and acknowledges the work of Breakthrough Breast Cancer and its memorable breast awareness message, Touch Look Check, which promotes knowledge of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer and the importance of regular checking.

17:07

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): It is nice after the rambunctious debate that we have just had to know that we are going to speak about something on which there is consensus in the chamber.

I thank everyone who signed up to the motion and everyone who is here to take part in the debate, because October is breast cancer awareness month. We have to acknowledge the role that having a breast cancer awareness month plays in promoting the early detection of breast cancer and the work of all the cancer charities in raising that awareness. I thank Breakthrough Breast Cancer in particular for the help that it has given me for the debate and for its very memorable breast awareness message—touch, look, check—which promotes knowledge of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer and the importance of regular checking.

I know that many members want to speak, so I will just start by outlining a few facts about breast cancer in Scotland. It is the most common cancer among Scottish women, and nearly 4,500 women are diagnosed every year in Scotland—in 2010, 460 of those women were in the area covered by NHS Lanarkshire, where I live and work. Around 1,000 Scottish women die annually from the disease and Scottish women have a one in nine chance of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. I know that others will develop those particular themes, so I will concentrate on a few points.

I want to raise concern about breast awareness in the lower socioeconomic groups. Women in

lower socioeconomic groups have poorer levels of breast cancer awareness compared with women in affluent groups. The 2011 survey that was carried out by Breakthrough Breast Cancer found that

“79% of women in group DE had knowledge of any sign/symptom of breast cancer compared to 93% of women”

in higher socioeconomic groups and

“only 47% of DE women checked their breasts once a month or more compared to 60% of women”

in socioeconomic group AB. That is an important point because, although breast cancer incidence is higher in affluent groups, women in more deprived groups have poorer outcomes and survival rates. Sometimes that is because they were diagnosed at a later stage; and sometimes it is because there can be an increased likelihood of there being other health problems. That means that it is important to improve levels of breast awareness. I know that Breakthrough Breast Cancer would like to see more focus on increasing breast awareness among those groups, combined with better public health messaging, so that people can improve their general health and improve their chances of a better outcome.

Another issue is older women. Over 80 per cent of breast cancers occur in women who are over 50. I know that there is a pilot going on in England on age extension from 47 to 63. I think, too, that the fact that age is the biggest risk factor for breast cancer makes it important that older women remain breast aware. Like Breakthrough Breast Cancer, I would like the national health service in Scotland to do more to focus on educating that age group about breast awareness.

That brings me to prevention. Some 80 per cent of breast cancers are not inherited. That figure surprised me very much. Although I had heard the other figures before, I realised, when I saw that one, that I suffered from what I believe to be a common misconception, which is that people are much more at risk if there is breast cancer in their family. Awareness must be raised about that figure of 80 per cent, which links into the breast awareness campaign.

Researchers estimate that around 40 per cent of all breast cancer cases could be prevented if women maintained a healthy weight, limited their alcohol intake and increased their level of physical activity. I am not going to say anything about anyone in here except me. I am not going to comment on my alcohol intake, but I certainly could increase my level of physical activity, and I do not think that my weight is particularly healthy. Again, that is a big issue.

If we can increase awareness of the fact that 80 per cent of breast cancers are not inherited and

that 40 per cent could be prevented, that would be a worthwhile campaign. A 40 per cent reduction would be equivalent to around 1,800 fewer cases of the disease being diagnosed in Scotland each year, so we should try to make a big difference by changing behaviours around the risk factors that are modifiable.

That brings me to diagnosis—I am aware that time is short, and I am glad that others will expand on these themes. There is a view that some health professionals are not as breast aware as they should be. The evidence is anecdotal, but we are told that some general practitioners are less breast aware than the women who present to them. There is a case for GPs receiving better education on the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, whether that is part of their medical training or part of engagement, in a continuing professional development capacity, with programmes such as the detect cancer early initiative. I know that many GPs are very involved with breast cancer charities, so I am not putting anyone down; I merely want to make it known that this issue is also important.

Some people believe that screening is not the best way to check for breast cancers. However, I believe that we should not allow that debate to put women off going for screening, as it is important. Further, we should ensure that women remain breast aware in between screenings.

I welcome the Breakthrough Breast Cancer initiative that has just produced a guide that contains the award-winning touch, look, check breast awareness message, which is available by texting “signs” to 84424. I should say that text users will be charged only their standard network rate and that no premium number charges apply. It is a very useful initiative. When the minister responds to some of my points and to those that others will make, I ask him to ensure that we maintain the detect cancer early campaign. It has been a big success and a great initiative, so we would like it to continue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As a number of members wish to speak, I would be grateful for speeches of four minutes or less.

17:15

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate. I note that she and I are both in purple today. We should have perhaps have co-ordinated and been in pink instead.

I also congratulate the many organisations, volunteers and supporters who have attended the Parliament this week and last on the issue. We have been privileged to celebrate the work of Breakthrough Breast Cancer and Walk the Walk, which organises Edinburgh’s moonwalk, when

pink bras invade the city. Linda Fabiani and perhaps even the minister and the cabinet secretary might want to join Sarah Boyack, Drew Smith and me, who went on this year’s moonwalk, on the walk next year.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Malcolm Chisholm did it, too.

Jackie Baillie: Forgive me, I almost forgot Malcolm Chisholm.

It would be a great signal for MSPs to walk the walk. Many of us, both male and female, have donned our pink feathered bras, hats and other more interesting items, some of which are, frankly, indescribable but all pink, in support of breast cancer awareness month. The stories that we heard were moving and dignified—from the initial shock of diagnosis, to the challenges of treatment and the positive stories of survival. We constantly need to remind ourselves of why this matters.

Yes, Scotland’s cancer record is continuing to improve and the fact that the survival rates of many cancers are increasing is to be celebrated. However, we should attribute part of that success to the increase in early diagnosis, to health education programmes aimed at encouraging earlier presentation and referral and to the raised awareness that is due to initiatives such as breast cancer awareness month.

We know that the earlier a cancer is recognised, the greater the chance of its being cured. That is why organisations such as Breakthrough Breast Cancer play such a key role. By sending out the simple message of TLC—touch, look and check—it is helping women themselves to identify problems earlier and ultimately helping to save lives across the country.

Cancer, though, is still a major issue that affects many of us in Scotland and breast cancer is a particular problem. It is the most common cancer among Scottish women: nearly 4,500 women are diagnosed every year, and around 1,000 die annually from the disease. I hope that we can do even more to ensure that more survive in the future. It is vital that we make every effort to reduce that number, and early detection programmes are simply the best way to do that.

Education is key. I found the statistics from Breakthrough Breast Cancer particularly appalling because they showed that only 3 per cent of women know that there are five or more different signs and symptoms of breast cancer. What is even more appalling is that 62 per cent of women do not check regularly, which is an easy thing to do. Scotland’s one-year survival rates are lower than those of other European countries, particularly Nordic countries. That is largely due to late presentation, because we do not check and we do not respond early enough.

In my view, breast-screening programmes are essential. Linda Fabiani referred to the debate about overdiagnosis and overtreatment, but that debate should be set clearly in the context of the impressive number of women who are diagnosed and treated successfully. Breast-screening programmes need to stay.

We had a debate earlier today, which was quite angry at points, about universal programmes versus targeting. However, we need to do both. We have a fine example of a universal screening programme, but we need to target disadvantaged areas more, because the risk of breast cancer is greater there. Women from deprived areas are less likely to be diagnosed early and have a lower survival rate than those in the most affluent areas. Therefore, we must do more to ensure that we reach those who live in disadvantaged communities.

I commend the Scottish Government for its current advertising campaign, which I think is fantastic. There is controversy about showing breasts on television and, dare I say it, even in newspapers. However, as Audrey Birt of Breakthrough Breast Cancer has said, "Get over it." If it helps to save lives, people should indeed get over it and support the campaign.

17:20

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing the debate on an issue of which many members will have personal experience—either themselves or through family members, neighbours or friends. I pay tribute to the women and men who are diagnosed with breast cancer and to the doctors, nurses, carers, families and friends who support them through often traumatic experiences.

The debate is all the more poignant for me because, as some members will know, my mum is currently undergoing treatment for breast cancer at Crosshouse hospital in Irvine. I thank members from across the chamber for their kind words of support over the past few months and I offer my encouragement to those who are here today who are similarly affected. My mum is doing fantastically well. I am certainly proud of her strength and courage and her determination to win her battle against cancer, as I did mine more than 20 years ago when I was 19. Had it not been for my mum's support and that of the many doctors and nurses who got me through it at the Beatson cancer centre in Glasgow, I know that I would not be here today.

I am sure that many of us are aware of the debate surrounding the Scottish Government's current detect cancer early scheme and the advert featuring Elaine C Smith, which has made

headlines not just in Scotland, but across the United Kingdom. To be honest, it is great news that people are aware of the campaign. If just a handful more women check for the symptoms that are detailed in the advert and appreciate that lumps are not the only signs of breast cancer, it will have been worth it.

We can stand here and welcome the £30 million of funding for such programmes, but I believe that ensuring protection for our nation's healthcare is more important than putting a monetary value on our national health service. Getting the right sort of educational message to people from a young age on how to check themselves and spot signs of breast cancer is vital to successful treatment. I believe that the Scottish Government is doing the right things in ensuring that waiting times for cancer patients are down and in highlighting how to detect cancer. We know that there is still more to do but, just a couple of weeks ago, we heard that, between April and June this year, 95.3 per cent of patients with suspected cancer started treatment within the target time of 62 days.

When cancer care nurses are asked what they think is the most effective form of detection, they do not hesitate in saying that breast-screening programmes have been invaluable. Last month's injection of £12 million to upgrade breast-screening equipment to digital equipment will therefore be welcomed by the health professionals who deal daily with cancer patients.

It is not just the Government and NHS staff who contribute to cancer care. As Jackie Baillie said, many members will have dressed in our finest pink garments and donned interesting accessories for the Breast Cancer Campaign's annual wear it pink day. Many members have hosted Macmillan Cancer Support's big coffee mornings. Last week, I was delighted to have one in the office that I share with my colleague Joan McAlpine in Dumfries.

We are familiar with the charity Cancer Research UK and we are here today because of my colleague Linda Fabiani's motion, which highlights Breakthrough Breast Cancer's touch, look, check campaign. However, there are many smaller local cancer support networks throughout Scotland, many of which become a lifeline for cancer patients when they undergo treatment and during their recovery period, as I know only too well. I publicly acknowledge those organisations and thank them for all their efforts on behalf of our constituents whom they support.

This evening, we are offering words of gratitude, support and encouragement to breast cancer patients and to the people who assist them. However, that is not all we are doing: I like to think that we are, as parliamentarians, committing ourselves to ensuring that our NHS remains able

to support all cancer patients, and that we are committing ourselves to an NHS that is free at the point of need and remains the mainstay of our public services, providing the best possible care and service.

I wish all breast cancer campaigns the best of success in the efforts to raise awareness, and have no doubt that members from all sides of the chamber give their full backing to those campaigns.

17:25

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I, too, thank Linda Fabiani for securing this timely debate. The motion emphasises the importance of early detection in all cancer cases, and recognises that the Scottish Government's detect cancer early initiative will first target breast cancer.

I add to that of Aileen McLeod my praise for the staff who work with people who have been diagnosed with cancer, and who do such great work, not only at the time of diagnosis, but through treatment and often beyond.

We know about breast cancer statistics: some 4,500 women, and some men, are diagnosed each year, and 1,000 will die each year from the disease. Linda Fabiani's motion says that, in 2010, 460 women in the NHS Lanarkshire area were diagnosed with the condition. When I read the motion, I immediately checked to see how many women in my area—Greater Glasgow and Clyde—had been so diagnosed, as I am sure many of my colleagues did for their areas.

Statistics are a valuable tool: they help to inform us as legislators, and they allow services to be shaped. However, every one of those statistics is a person who has been given a diagnosis that they feared and who now knows that they are likely to face months of treatment.

I have an admission to make: when I looked at the figures that were helpfully provided by Breakthrough Breast Cancer, my first thought was not to look at the latest figures, but to check how many women in Greater Glasgow at the time shared my experience of being diagnosed with breast cancer—I cannot remember precisely when, but I think it was four years ago in 2008, which seems such a long time ago—and the number was 940 women. The cancer that I had affects only 1 per cent of those who are diagnosed and, although surgery and reconstruction were required, I was exceptionally lucky because I did not need chemotherapy or radiotherapy and was back at work less than two months after surgery. I am not sure that was a benefit, but there we go.

My reason for mentioning my own case is simply to reinforce the message that although screening is important, being aware of changes to your breasts is essential, no matter one's age. Members may find it hard to believe, but when I was diagnosed I was too young—just—to have been called for screening. I had noticed a change; it was not a lump—I will spare people the details—but let me just say that in my case size really did matter. My experience is why I think that the Scottish Government's current adverts that remind women of the need to be aware of any change to their breasts are so important, and why the TLC campaign is vital.

I decided to mention my experience because I am worried about the number of women in constituencies like mine who do not attend screening. As with so many other health issues, women from poorer areas are least likely to attend and most likely to need radical surgery and treatment when they are eventually diagnosed. I ask the minister to consider targeting those communities in order to encourage more women to come forward.

If we return to the statistics, only about 70 per cent of women in Glasgow take up the opportunity to have screening. I suspect, too, that the statistics cannot tell us the number of women who continue to soldier on when they know they have a problem, either because they are afraid of what it may mean or because they are worried about who will look after their children if they have to go into hospital and whether their employer will be sympathetic when they need time off.

My message is clear: "If you are called for screening, go. If you spot something that's just a little bit different from normal, go to your GP as soon as you can. Follow the TLC campaign, encourage your daughters, your friends and anyone you know to do so, too. In most cases, you won't have cancer and, if you do, the earlier it's caught, the simpler the treatment is likely to be and the greater your chances of making a full recovery."

17:29

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I was privileged a few weeks ago to attend the Breakthrough Breast Cancer workshop. It was at that workshop, led by Ashley Donaldson—a champion for Breakthrough Breast Cancer—that I realised the importance of TLC. TLC is something that we can all accept and look towards, because it means different things to different people.

I applaud the courage and bravery of those who have shared their personal experiences this evening. Patricia Ferguson is absolutely right—

statistics are people, and it is a shock to people when they are diagnosed. There is fear and anxiety. Breakthrough Breast Cancer encourages TLC at an early age for those who may not think that they will be affected by breast cancer and who are certainly outwith the age range for screening. If we can get young people to check regularly and do TLC in their teens, it will not be a problem for them when they are in their 40s, 50s, 60s and so on. It will be natural.

Breakthrough Breast Cancer encourages a routine. That is the way forward. It can be done when one has a shower or gets ready for bed. We are not asking for checks every day, but we are asking people to get into a routine and to be aware of changes. We are asking people to be more aware of their bodies.

Very few men suffer from breast cancer. In fact, the number in Scotland is about 0.6 per cent. The symptoms for men are not so different from those for women. There could be a hardening around the breast area or changes around the nipple. Often, though, breast cancer is painless, and most men would probably disregard it. Scottish men in particular would probably disregard it because they are not particularly good at going to the doctor anyway, with any condition. Perhaps we need to get over those barriers. We need to encourage people to be aware of their body and changes in their body.

I support the work of Breakthrough Breast Cancer and encourage those who can to become champions for the charity throughout Scotland, to take forward the TLC initiative and to help and encourage people to become aware, because becoming aware saves lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As a large number of members still wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate for up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended for up to 30 minutes.—[*Linda Fabiani.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:33

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in the debate and thank Linda Fabiani for securing it. She has given us the opportunity not only to discuss our experiences of breast cancer and highlight the challenges that people continue to face, but to thank the many people who work for breast cancer charities and organisations throughout Scotland.

There will be a person in our constituencies who, at this very moment, is worried about a lump or a change in their breast. They will be awash

with anxiety but they will be reluctant to take that all-important step and make an appointment with their doctor. It is for that person that I welcome tonight's debate. I understand that sense of trepidation, as I am sure we all do, but it is always better to know the truth than to live in fear and doubt, especially where one's health is concerned. It is for that person, and for the many other people around the United Kingdom who are affected by breast cancer every day, that I welcome Breakthrough Breast Cancer's touch, look, check campaign.

Like many others, I had the opportunity to attend a session with the Breakthrough team that recently visited the Parliament. I learned more about self-checking, particularly its importance in early diagnosis or simply as a means of alleviating doubt. The team does a fantastic job, and I hope that the crucial message that it promotes is beginning to reap rewards.

I was especially attentive to what the Breakthrough team said about self-checking, especially as I had thought that I had all the information that I needed. Since I was a teenage girl, I have been trained in what to look for and have carried out regular checks on myself. Only last Christmas, my sister and I received a self-examination glove and information DVD from our mum. That was not the gift that I had asked for, and members can imagine the look on my face when I opened the somewhat curious present, but I can honestly say that it is the most important present that I have ever received.

My mum was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 33. At the time, I was only 10 and did not realise how life-changing that diagnosis would be. I did not understand the magnitude of a double mastectomy, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or reconstructive surgery; what I did understand was that it was a frightening experience that caused a lot of physical and emotional pain, not only to my mum, but to the rest of our family. Although that pain reduces over time, it never goes away.

It is because of that that I believe that we need to offer more counselling to families and, in particular, children during such a traumatic time. I know that counselling services have moved on in the past 18 years, but there is always room for improvement.

I also believe that we should make a concerted effort to increase awareness of male breast cancer. The incidence of breast cancer is far lower among men—around 300 men are diagnosed with breast cancer each year in the UK and around 25 in Scotland—but, whatever the figure, more attention must be paid to the men who are potentially at risk. I have already alluded to my mum's case and, as we have heard, many other members have had similar experiences, but I did

not mention that her father—my grandfather—was also diagnosed with, and indeed died from, breast cancer. Therefore—believe me—when I say that we need to do more to increase awareness, I am talking from bitter experience.

My mother's cancer is genetic, and although I realise that that is also rare, I know that my family is not alone. That is the message that we should be broadcasting to all those people who are affected by breast cancer: you are not alone. Help is always at hand. All you have to do is ask. That is the message of breast cancer awareness month, and it is why we must all keep supporting it.

17:37

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to speak in this debate at the start of breast cancer awareness month and I congratulate Linda Fabiani on her motion, which highlights the importance of early diagnosis of breast cancer. I would also like to endorse Jackie Baillie's recently lodged motion on the same subject, because I think that it is important that we all unite in support of Breakthrough Breast Cancer and other cancer charities, which are working to get home to women the importance of looking out for any physical changes that might indicate cancer at an early stage, when it is likely to be easily and successfully treated. We have heard of many personal successes this evening.

It is important, too, to acknowledge the Government's detect cancer early initiative, which has rightly selected breast cancer as the first cancer type to be targeted.

Given that breast cancer affects one in eight of the female population, I have no doubt that we have all been in contact with someone who has developed breast cancer. I had my first close contact with the condition more than 30 years ago, when I and three close friends from my medical school class all developed breast lumps. Mine was a cyst, and I still remember the palpable relief all around when the surgeon's probe found fluid rather than solid tissue. One of my friends had a benign fibroadenoma, while the other two had cancer. Sadly, one of them died fairly soon after diagnosis from liver secondaries. If anyone has noticed the well-worn and very shabby purse that I always carry with me, the reason I will not replace it is because it was a 21st birthday present from that friend. The fourth member of our group lived with her cancer for around 15 years, until she eventually succumbed to very slow-growing lung secondaries. Therefore, I have been very much aware of breast cancer for many years. I would never miss a screening appointment, and I intend to submit to regular mammography after the age when screening is routinely on offer.

I was interested to hear Linda Fabiani mention older women, because the need to be aware of breast cancer into old age was brought home to me recently when a friend, who is also a constituent, contacted me to ask for breast cancer statistics in women over the age of 70. While she was in hospital for a lumpectomy, she had met two other patients in the same ward whose cancer had been diagnosed when they were in their 70s. That set me thinking about how many women, once they have reached the age when routine screening stops, might assume that their risk of developing breast cancer has fallen when, in fact, the risk increases with age.

With an ageing population, an increasing number of women will be at risk. I know that Breakthrough Breast Cancer and other organisations point out that the risk continues, but I wonder whether more emphasis should be put on that. I raised that point with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing during health questions last week.

Clearly, the importance of early diagnosis applies to all age groups. I hope that the publicity of breast cancer awareness month will remind all women of not only regular screening but regular self-examination and encourage them to pay attention to the touch, look, check message that is being promoted by Breakthrough Breast Cancer. Many people nowadays survive diagnosis of breast cancer for many years, and many more could do so if that diagnosis was made early.

I congratulate Linda Fabiani on doing her bit in Parliament to highlight the need to be aware of breast cancer, and I give all credit to those who work year in, year out to educate the general public on the importance of regular vigilance and self-examination, so that the condition can be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

17:40

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I add my thanks to Linda Fabiani for securing today's debate.

Last week, I was one of thousands of people to join in the world's biggest coffee morning in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. I was delighted that the people of Erskine who attended helped to raise more than £160. I say a big thank you to everyone who came along on Friday.

Today's debate is very sensitive, as breast cancer affects almost every family across Scotland and further afield. I speak as someone who has benefited from genetic testing. Because of a genetic breast cancer in my family, I know only too well how crucial the research into and advances in detection and treatment of cancer are.

This month, many charities and organisations are helping to raise awareness of breast cancer, from Macmillan Cancer Support and Breakthrough Breast Cancer in Scotland to the White House and the National Football League in the States. It is right that we have the chance to debate how we raise awareness in this chamber. Last month, the Scottish Government launched a new advert, fronted by Elaine C Smith, which has been mentioned by other members in this debate. Some people have referred to the advert as “shocking”. I would prefer that the likes of the BBC used adjectives such as “vital”, “necessary” or “crucial” to encourage women to look for early signs, not to scare them—suspecting that one has breast cancer is already a frightening experience.

I want to focus on tackling inequalities in screening. In NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, it was found that women with learning difficulties were less likely to take up screening than those in other NHS regions. Those women are more likely to wait longer before seeing a doctor or less likely to attend screenings. There needs to be more effort to encourage women with learning difficulties to have regular screening. How we target that group of vulnerable women is a serious issue that the Parliament must address—with regard to screenings not only for breast cancer, but for all cancers.

Recently, the Equal Opportunities Committee launched its report into Gypsy Traveller communities’ access to healthcare, which included access to screenings by Gypsy Traveller women. Another report suggested that the best way to educate younger generations of Gypsy Traveller women is to go through the matriarch, who is normally the grandmother in the family. I look forward to working further with the committee and the new Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing on improving access to healthcare for Gypsy Traveller women, especially to improve the early detection of cancers, which can save the lives of many.

There appears to be a decline in the number of women who access screening when we look from the least-deprived areas to the most-deprived areas. As with women with learning difficulties, there is a lower uptake among women from the poorest areas of society. Although it is good practice for mobile breast-screening units to be parked near community centres and libraries, we must remember that those facilities are often the first to be closed as a result of budget cuts, especially in poor areas. That means that poor women will continue to have the lowest uptake of breast cancer screening.

In closing, I commend the work of Breakthrough Breast Cancer and its excellent touch, look, check campaign.

17:44

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing this important debate.

We can celebrate the improvements that there have been in breast cancer survival rates. Twenty years ago, just over 60 per cent of women survived five years beyond diagnosis; twenty years later the rate is upwards of 80 per cent. However, we must remember that more than 1,000 women a year die from breast cancer.

We must also remember that five-year survival is not always the end of the matter. Nanette Milne reminded us that slow-growing secondaries sometimes arise. Of course, the primary tumour can recur, as I was reminded at the moonwalk reception last night, when a marvellous woman from Glasgow, who is still young, told me that, sadly, her breast cancer, which was treated a little while ago, has recurred.

A problem that we have in Scotland is that more people die within a year of diagnosis than is the case in other countries. That is related to late presentation, which is why the Government’s detect cancer early initiative is so important. As other members did, I welcome the recent advertising campaign in that regard and I pay tribute to the work of Breakthrough Breast Cancer in its TLC campaign.

Breakthrough should be commended for a range of work that it has done during the past few years, such as the service pledge that it pioneered, its campaign on lymphoedema, a debate about which I was pleased to introduce two years ago, and its great work in the field of research. I acknowledge the great Breakthrough Breast Cancer research unit at the Western general hospital.

I also pay tribute to the amazing breast unit at the Western general. The main reason for our much better five-year survival rates than we had 20 years ago is the improved treatments and services at units such as the one at the Western general in Edinburgh and the Beatson in Glasgow, which Aileen McLeod mentioned.

I have talked about Breakthrough Breast Cancer, but it would be wrong to forget other charities that work in the area, which are mentioned in general terms in the motion. Breast Cancer Care provides invaluable services and three years ago developed standards for secondary breast cancer that were widely praised at the time. It would be interesting to know to what extent the standards have been taken up, if the minister has information about that.

Challenge Breast Cancer Scotland had a meeting in the Parliament last Tuesday—we have

had three such receptions in the Parliament in a week. I have a particular attachment to that campaign, which started in 1994 and used to be called the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign. I remember introducing a debate in the House of Commons a few months after the organisation started up, one of the purposes of which was to praise the campaign and the enormous lobby of Downing Street that took place in 1994 to demand more research and better services—two areas in which there has subsequently been great progress.

At the Challenge Breast Cancer Scotland meeting last week a general practitioner from Glasgow gave a talk that contained a very negative message about screening. I think that the majority of people in the breast cancer field would not agree with what she said, but I support Challenge Breast Cancer Scotland's demand for an informed choice for women about screening decisions.

I think that we can all agree with that, but I also think that positive messages must be sent out about screening as well as checking and general awareness. Given that 1,000 women a year die from breast cancer, no one—not the health service, the Government or the charities—can rest until that number has drastically reduced.

17:48

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I congratulate Linda Fabiani on securing time for this debate and I thank her for lodging a motion on an important issue that affects many women in Scotland—and has done for many years.

Breast cancer awareness month presents an important opportunity for us not just to reflect on what has happened over the years and the campaign for more effective treatment and support for women who are diagnosed with breast cancer, but to ensure that we consider the future and the opportunities that will arise as a result of advances in medical science. Alongside that, we need to keep focused on a cancer that continues to affect so many people in Scotland.

I thank in particular the range of charities that do a tremendous amount of work not only to raise awareness among women and the general public, but to support women and their families as they undergo treatment after their diagnosis. Although that bit can often be forgotten, it should not be underestimated.

For most of us, being diagnosed with cancer is probably the worst scenario that we can imagine. Our response might well be informed by past experience of seeing a friend or loved one with the disease. Although I am not sure that we will ever

be able to eradicate that fear, it is worth bearing in mind that the outcomes from a cancer diagnosis are, for many cancers, radically different from what they were 20 or 30 years ago.

In the debate, a number of members have mentioned how breast cancer has touched their lives and has resulted, perhaps, in the loss of a friend. However, many of us who might not have lost a friend through breast cancer are likely to know someone who has survived it. After all, the number of women who survive the illness is increasing, largely as a result of the good progress that has been made in treatment over the past two decades. Moreover, breast cancer screening has helped to ensure that women are diagnosed earlier, which means that treatment can be given earlier and less aggressive treatments used. Another piece of good news is that nine out of 10 women diagnosed with stage 1 breast cancer now survive beyond five years.

That said, we need to recognise that Scotland's cancer survival rates continue to lag behind those in other European countries. Given that and our ageing population, we expect the incidence of cancer to increase. Clearly we have to do more in this area.

We know that breast cancer is common, with one in nine Scottish women being diagnosed with it in their lifetime, but by detecting it earlier we can treat people while they are in better health and with, as I said, less aggressive treatments. However, if we are to continue to turn the tables in our fight against cancer, we have to get better at detecting it even earlier, and that is exactly the aim of the detect cancer early programme to which a number of members have referred. It is all about changing people's mindset about cancer and its signs and ensuring that not only individuals but our clinicians and other healthcare support staff are more vigilant.

Part of the programme is a social marketing strategy that seeks to ensure that health professionals have more of an understanding. We have also started a new programme of work with Healthcare Improvement Scotland to review the Scottish referral guidelines for breast, colorectal and lung cancer and find out whether they can be improved. We are also examining the capacity issues that are likely to arise in screening and diagnostic services as a result of the changing demographic situation in Scotland.

As far as breast cancer is concerned, we have launched the breast cancer social marketing campaign. Of course, each year many MSPs get involved in some form of social marketing themselves when they don pink hats, pink rosettes or whatever pink thing they choose to put on, but it is all part of the social marketing campaign that we

carry out with third sector organisations in order to raise awareness.

Jackie Baillie made the important point that some of the research shows that women are not necessarily as aware of the common signs of breast cancer as they should be, nor are they aware of the changing survival rates or of a variety of changes that can take place within a breast. That is why we produced the breast cancer campaign. It would be fair to say that it has generated a considerable amount of interest and discussion, which is good, because that is exactly what it was meant to do. It was meant to encourage people to talk about such matters much more openly. As Audrey Birt says, people will just have to get over it and start to discuss these things much more openly, because that is the healthy way in which to address this challenge.

Several members referred to the screening programme. We are putting further investment into that programme over the next three years to upgrade the system to a digital one, which is much more effective.

I am conscious that we need to make more progress, particularly for women from more deprived communities who might not take up the opportunity of screening. Mary Fee made a point about the health inequalities that exist for individuals who have learning disabilities. There are clearly grounds for us to consider more closely how to cover that.

I give members my commitment that, where we can take further measures to encourage more women from deprived communities to take up the opportunity of screening, we will do so in a way that recognises that some of them may require support. If they have learning disabilities, we will make the system as accessible to them as possible and ensure that we encourage them to make use of screening in Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:56.

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