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Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 19 March 2013

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Maud Robinson, who is a minister to the Unitarians in Edinburgh at St Mark's Church.

The Rev Maud Robinson (Minister, Unitarians in Edinburgh at St Mark's Church): Thank you very much for inviting me here this afternoon.

In years gone by, confessing a Unitarian faith could lead one to a sticky end. In 1697, Thomas Aikenhead, a young Edinburgh medical student, rejected the doctrine of the Trinity; for that offence he was hanged. It was not until 1813 that the Unitarian Relief Act granted toleration for Unitarian worship. This year marks the 200th anniversary of that act of toleration.

With our Unitarian history of being denied tolerance, a strong strand of Unitarian faith and practice has championed toleration of difference. Our congregations now comprise people who identify as Christian, Buddhist, humanist and agnostic, and many others, so I commend to you some thoughts about tolerance.

Words evolve and change, but they often continue to carry nuances from the past. That is why it is important that we think deeply about the particular words that we use. The root of the word "tolerance" carries, as one meaning,

"to experience or undergo pain or hardship".

Are those really the terms in which we wish to view our relationships with those who differ from us? Maybe it is time to look beyond the word "tolerance". What word can we think of using in its place?

There is compassion—the central virtue of all the world faiths. It is a worthy ideal to aspire to, but does it cover the same ground as tolerance? Is it so wide that the initial focus on relations with those who differ from us is lost? If we try to approach those of different beliefs with compassion, we may treat them with kindness as fellow human beings, but does it challenge us to truly engage with them in relation to their differing beliefs and world views?

What about acceptance? It certainly does not carry the grudging connotations of tolerance, but it can imply an uncritical wholesale embrace of

everything that is said or done in the name of a cultural or faith tradition. As thinking people, we cannot accept actions that emanate from a different world view if they are harmful to others. That can be a difficult line to walk, but blind acceptance is not the answer.

Finally, I suggest respect. Respect means "to value others". Tolerance can avoid engagement; respect welcomes it. This vision of moving beyond tolerance towards respect and active engagement with difference seems a better aspiration. Respect speaks more of thoughtful consideration. It is more generous than the implications of doing something grudgingly, which can be understood by tolerance, but it is more thoughtful and constructively critical than careless acceptance.

If each one of us could strive to treat those who are different from us with engaged respect, rather than with grudging tolerance or unthinking acceptance, we might indeed find ourselves living in a much better world. Thank you for your attention.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Expert Group on the Leveson Report in Scotland

1. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it will respond to the report of the expert group on the Leveson report in Scotland. (S4T-00283)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): First, I thank the expert group chaired by Lord McCluskey for its swift work, its clearly drafted report and its interesting recommendations. The report was published only on Friday afternoon and, in the past 24 hours, there have been further major developments at Westminster. We now want to work towards not simply a Scottish Government response to these matters but one that continues the involvement of other parties in the Parliament.

For that reason, we intend to continue the meetings between party leaders that started towards the end of last year. In particular, we expect that a meeting between party leaders here and the United Kingdom Government can be arranged quickly, as we had always intended would happen once the UK Government position was agreed. We will examine and will want to discuss with the UK Government the implications of the royal charter proposition. We also want to involve the Parliament as a whole, so we intend to seek an opportunity to bring the matter before the chamber after the Easter recess.

Jim Eadie: Does the cabinet secretary recall that Lord Leveson was asked to conduct his inquiry because of the widespread public revulsion at the reprehensible actions of some journalists and some newspapers and that, although there is a legitimate debate about what should replace the current system of self-regulation, we can all agree that a free press and the need for robust investigative journalism must be balanced with the needs of vulnerable people and other members of the public who have found themselves victims of inexcusable press behaviour?

Fiona Hyslop: I agree with those points. The report that Lord Justice Leveson produced was indeed a balanced report that had to balance the interests of many different areas. The importance of victims must never be forgotten. We were appalled by the evidence that we saw, but we must remember that it did not involve all journalists or all publications.

When it comes to supporting a genuinely independent self-regulatory system, we need to find a way forward, and I think that the best way to

find that way forward is through consensus. That is one of the reasons why the party leaders have met Hacked Off, as a representative of victims, and, last week, newspaper representatives.

Jim Eadie: I thank the cabinet secretary for that further clarification.

As we move forward to the detailed and careful consideration process, the continuing discussions with the Westminster Government and the debate that will take place in this Parliament, can the cabinet secretary reassure the Parliament that we will seek a consensus that secures the independence of any new regulatory bodies?

Fiona Hyslop: I strongly believe in a free press. I agree with the recommendations by Lord Justice Leveson that there should be an independent self-regulatory system, but we need to have checks and balances in that system. That is why we must examine what the implications of the royal charter are, because some of the issues to do with incentives and arbitration that are important to the Leveson recommendations must be considered in the context of Scots law. I have had agreement from Maria Miller and the Advocate General for Scotland that once the UK Government achieved an agreed position, we could examine what the implications are, in particular for Scots law.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): With the agreement at Westminster, we do not want Scotland to be left behind on the matter of press regulation. What was greatly disappointing about the McCluskey report that was published on Friday was the fact that the expert group did not consider to any great extent the carrots and sticks—the incentives—that might be used in Scots law. The advisers recommended 10 possible incentives. As time is short, is the cabinet secretary considering a public consultation so that we can gather views from across Scotland about whether those carrots and sticks are appropriate for Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: The member is correct to identify that the advisers provided some advice or information in that area. I point out that the terms of reference for the expert group said that any developments in press regulation elsewhere in the UK that arose from the Leveson inquiry should be considered. However, the member is correct to identify that the exemplary charges and exemplary damages do not apply in Scotland. That is why we must look at other areas.

Jim Eadie is also correct to identify the need for public consultation. That would be something for the Parliament to decide on, but we should think about whether, in a short period of time, there might be an opportunity to do as he suggests.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Leveson wrote that he did not want to recommend one

more last-chance saloon for the press. McCluskey went further by suggesting that if the press did not come forward with a regulatory body that sought recognition, legislation should establish one instead. What are the Scottish Government's views on the actions that will become necessary if the industry does not come forward with a body seeking formal recognition, and on which legislature will take responsibility?

Fiona Hyslop: The point for the here and now, as we have heard from other members, is that we should look for a consensus to ensure that a self-regulatory system is established, rather than resorting to any other means.

On compulsion, I think that that is the problem with what has emerged from the McCluskey report in particular in relation to the jurisdiction issues. We must consider how we can have checks and balances to allow a voluntary membership, self-regulatory press system to operate. The member is correct to consider that we do not necessarily know at this stage what the implications of the royal charter are, and there are obviously different options for going forward. However, I would rather deal with the positives of what we can achieve, which is why I appeal for the co-operation of the member and others in trying to agree a consensual position. However, notwithstanding any of that, Jim Eadie's original point about the importance of the experience of victims and having checks and balances must be paramount.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that an appropriate committee of the Scottish Parliament should take evidence on the proposed royal charter and its implications for Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: Clearly, we are quite limited by the timescale. Indeed, the Prime Minister indicated that he would want to take a royal charter to the Privy Council in May. However, if Clare Adamson's view—I think that Patrick Harvie indicated this as well—is that we need an opportunity to examine the proposed royal charter, then I think that it would be preferable if the appropriate committee could hold some evidence sessions, however pressured the timescale might be, so that we can look at what checks and balances can be achieved using Scots law and at the implications of the royal charter.

Unauthorised Protests (Police Response)

2. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on recent reports expressing concern at the police handling of unauthorised protests. (S4T-00293)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Decisions on operational policing are

clearly a matter for the chief constable, but we have complete faith in our police officers to take necessary and appropriate action to tackle those who break the law. There is a procedure in place, which was introduced by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administration in 2006, that requires an application for permission to march to be submitted to the local authority no later than 28 days before any event. That is intended to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to protect the interests both of those who wish to march and of members of the public who might be caught up in an unplanned event.

In relation to events in Glasgow on Saturday, no such application was received. Strathclyde Police would be happy to brief any elected member on recent events, which may give a more accurate picture of all the circumstances. Full video footage of the event cannot be released at the moment due to its role in criminal proceedings. Again, it will provide a fuller picture of all the circumstances surrounding Saturday's events. That footage will also be available to elected members at the conclusion of proceedings.

Michael McMahon: I had a meeting yesterday with a chief superintendent in Glasgow about the issues that were raised on Saturday. However, does the cabinet secretary recall that, at justice questions last week, I raised the concerns that have been expressed by lawyers, academics and football fans that the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012 and the policing of it are failing to tackle the problem of sectarianism in Scotland and are, in fact, raising tensions and being counterproductive? In response to the harassment, victimisation and disproportionate actions of the police in pursuing the 2012 act, a protest was held on Saturday by Celtic fans. Sadly, it has now been widely alleged not only by fans but by Queen's counsel and independent legal advisers who attended on Saturday that the event was met with the very harassment, victimisation and disproportionate actions from the police that the fans were protesting against in the first place.

The proposed procession may well have been outwith—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Can we have a question, Mr McMahon?

Michael McMahon: The proposed procession may well have been outwith the regulations outlined by the cabinet secretary, but the complaints that have emanated from the actions of the police in dealing with the procession should shock and alarm the chamber. Will the minister therefore agree to hold an independent investigation into the police's handling of the event, both to learn lessons from it and to try to

reduce the increasing tensions across Scotland between fans and the police as a result of the police's implementation of the 2012 act?

Kenny MacAskill: Michael McMahon did the right thing by seeking to speak to a senior police officer in Strathclyde. If he still has concerns, he should raise them with Campbell Corrigan, the chief constable, and if he is not satisfied by that, he can raise them with the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland or, when it moves, the police investigations and review commissioner.

We should be clear that the background of Saturday's events related to public order and the circumstances that we sometimes face in Glasgow with unauthorised marches, whether by the Scottish Defence League or other groups that may be of a sectarian nature. Such marches are required to have the local authority's view on them. The position that is taken in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006, which was introduced by a Liberal-Labour Administration, of which Mr McMahon was a supporter, is to ensure that local authorities, representing local people, are able to have their views on whether a demonstration would be appropriate or fair.

None of the charges that were made on Saturday—which I read about in the paper and which Mr McMahon was doubtless advised of—relates to the 2012 act. They relate to other issues, whether misuse of drugs, breach of the peace, or other public order matters.

In these circumstances we should allow Glasgow City Council to decide what demonstrations and marches should be allowed, so that the elected citizens of Glasgow can decide what is fair and appropriate, and what their communities should have to endure.

Michael McMahon: I congratulate the cabinet secretary on using the same deflection that the police used yesterday with me. The protest was held because of concerns over the implementation of the act by the police inside and outside football grounds, which has been deemed unfair and disproportionate.

The Presiding Officer: Do you have a question, Mr McMahon?

Michael McMahon: I met Celtic supporters last night who are asking for an inquiry into what happened on Saturday, so that everyone can be satisfied that the 2012 act is not being administered in the way that people believe it to be. It is raising tensions and concerns. If we want to tackle the problem, we have to address the problem effectively.

Kenny MacAskill: I repeat that the events on Saturday were not to do with the 2012 act, apart from the fact that some wished to demonstrate

against it. They are entitled to do that, but they are required by the legislation that was introduced by the Labour-Liberal Administration to put in an application to Glasgow City Council—or any other council that is asked to host such a march—at least 28 days beforehand and let the council decide. If they do not do that, we have difficulties. An SDL demonstration was also anticipated on Saturday to commemorate the death of young Kriss Donald, which caused great grief to his family. It is perfectly appropriate that elected representatives in Glasgow or elsewhere should be able to decide whether a march is fit and appropriate. If it is fit and appropriate for members of the green brigade to march, they will be allowed to do so, but they will follow the directions and strictures laid down by Glasgow City Council and adhere to the rules and laws that will be enforced and implemented by the police and which, I remind Mr McMahon, were brought in by his party as part of the Liberal and Labour Administration in 2006. It was the right decision then and it is the right decision today.

The local authority should be able to decide and the police should be able to monitor. Had the green brigade put in an application, I have no doubt that many of the councillors who have expressed views would have been able to support it and laid down conditions that would have been appropriate for it.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary accept that many of my constituents want a stronger level of policing around football matches? They are fed up with their driveways being obstructed, with alcohol being drunk in the streets and with people urinating in public.

Kenny MacAskill: The overwhelming majority of football fans are law abiding and well behaved, and they enjoy the game, behave themselves and do not cause any inconvenience. A minority cause considerable difficulties, and John Mason makes a good point in drawing attention to them. However, I, like others in this chamber, attended a football match on Sunday that was well behaved and a credit to both sets of fans from different sides of the country, and that is how we want to see football enjoyed.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): The issue is not just about marches and demonstrations. I, too, have received complaints over the past few months from constituents who include Rangers supporters as well as Celtic supporters. It has been suggested that the 2012 act is being used to harass football fans, not deal with illegal behaviour. The cabinet secretary would be foolish to ignore those growing complaints. Will he act and order an inquiry with a report to the

Parliament before large sections of football supporters lose confidence in the police?

Kenny MacAskill: I have every confidence in the police. I recall that Rangers recently played in a game in Berwick that was broadcast live in which sectarian singing was clearly audible, and there were great complaints about that. I am delighted to say that it appears that the police have taken some action, as the 2012 act has extraterritoriality. That has been welcomed. It will be for the courts to decide, so I will not go into any matters further, as they are sub judice. However, we believe that the 2012 act is working well. Some 84 per cent of those who have been dealt with under it have been convicted, and Scottish sport and football are better for it.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): A number of my constituents have raised concerns with me, too, about the weekend's events. Can the cabinet secretary provide further details on the strategy for tackling disorderly behaviour in general?

Kenny MacAskill: The strategy is to work with football authorities, which we do, to prioritise public safety and address any threatening sectarian or other offensive behaviour at football matches. That is why we brought in the act and established the football co-ordination unit for Scotland. We work with football authorities to allow the game to be enjoyed. The game on Sunday was enjoyed by 45,000 people at Hampden, and that is what should happen at football matches. They should be enjoyed without people who are watching on television or who are in the ground or anywhere else having to put up with offensive and threatening sectarian behaviour.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Like other members, I have been contacted by many constituents in Glasgow about the specific instance at the weekend. I have also been contacted in the past following demonstrations by anti-fascist and anti-austerity campaigners in Glasgow, and I am being contacted more often by football supporters.

In what circumstances does the cabinet secretary believe that the police should use the practice of kettling, which I believe we refer to in Scotland as containment? What are the implications for members of the public who may not have previously been caught up in such demonstrations and their trust in the police? Obviously, kettling is extremely distressing for people who are caught up in it.

Kenny MacAskill: I can only refer Mr Smith to the answers that I gave to Mr McMahon earlier. He took it upon himself to meet representatives of Strathclyde Police. I suggest that Mr Smith liaise with Strathclyde Police. If he is still dissatisfied

after that, he has the right, through how matters are dealt with constitutionally and by statute, to raise the matter with the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland.

Iraq Invasion (10th Anniversary)

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05981, in the name of Alex Salmond, on 10 years on from the invasion of Iraq.

14:22

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): In discussing the motion, we should reflect that tomorrow marks the 10th anniversary of the start of the war in Iraq. As we consider the lessons and implications of the United Kingdom Government's decision to take the country into that war, our first thought should be for the casualties of the conflict. Since March 2003, 179 UK servicemen and women have been killed in Iraq. The total allied losses are close to 5,000, and an estimated 120,000 Iraqi civilians died as a result of the conflict. Estimates of the total casualty list in Iraq are, of course, much higher. Every single one of those losses, as well as every one of those who have been physically and mentally scarred by events in Iraq, is a tragedy, and it is right that we honour the bravery and sacrifice of those who are put in harm's way.

However, those facts—raw and shocking as they are—go nowhere near telling the full horror and the true human catastrophe of the invasion and its aftermath. That endures to this day, and in many ways is incalculable. We must never forget the cost of war, and we must never forget our ongoing obligations for the welfare of our service personnel and veterans. We owe all the men and women in our armed forces respect, gratitude and support.

Last week, Labour and Conservative members expressed concern that we were going to have this debate at all. It is quite extraordinary that, given the 10th anniversary of the start of the war in Iraq, its implications, and the events and consequences of that conflict, any member should not want to reflect on what happened, why it happened and, above all, what lessons can be learned.

All of us should remember that while we as politicians debate these issues and have done so for 10 years now, many tens—indeed, hundreds—of thousands either are not here to have this debate because they were casualties of the conflict or are living with injury or disability as a consequence of it.

We hold the debate as we still await the final report of the Iraq inquiry, led by Sir John Chilcot and established in 2009. That inquiry, which was established too late and still has not reported 10 years after the conflict, seeks answers around a sequence of events that took our armed forces

into a war that, in my opinion, was illegal and unnecessary.

Perhaps some of the reluctance to debate this issue arises from the suggestion, made, for example, in *The Guardian* on 16 November 2011, that the report had been delayed again because of

“Damning criticism of Tony Blair and the way his government led Britain into invading Iraq, and continuing rows over the disclosure of secret documents”.

It is almost absurd that the only public official who has resigned as a consequence of the Iraq war was Greg Dyke, the director general of the BBC.

I welcome the Chilcot inquiry. Indeed, I was party to a motion in the House of Commons in 2006 that tried to force such an inquiry much earlier and which failed by only 25 votes.

In the same way, 10 years ago, I was in the House of Commons debating the question of going to war. In that debate, the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, used extraordinary eloquence to justify the conflict; in his speech, he said that it was “palpably absurd” to suggest that Saddam Hussein had “unilaterally” destroyed his weapons of mass destruction. As we now know, the palpable absurdity was Mr Blair's own. He took the United Kingdom into war on the basis of a gross deception and in contravention of international law.

We now know that the Prime Minister's statements were inconsistent with the information that he had from intelligence services at the time. We now know that the presentation of the dodgy dossier was deliberately designed to excite fears and exaggerate the threat to international order posed by Saddam Hussein. I have here an example of how the dodgy dossier was portrayed: the headline on the front page of the *London Evening Standard* from September 2002 says “45 MINUTES FROM ATTACK”. According to the dodgy dossier, the UK's bases in Cyprus were under threat from Saddam Hussein when, as we now know, he had no weapons of mass destruction that were capable of being used in the first place.

We know that the information from intelligence was exaggerated; small quantities in that intelligence became major amounts. The threat was presented as being major when in fact the intelligence said that it was minor.

We also know that eminent figures from the time have said conclusively that the war was indeed illegal. The former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan confirmed in 2004 that from a UN charter point of view the war was illegal, and Philippe Sands, QC and professor of international law, described the war as “wholly illegal”, pointing out that it was not even justified on the classic ground of self-defence.

Most damning of all, as we await the Chilcot inquiry's conclusions, we now know from the evidence of the UK ambassador to Washington, who was with the Prime Minister during his conversations with President Bush, that the Prime Minister pre-committed himself—come what may—to stand with President Bush, regardless of what actions were taken. Sir Christopher Meyer said that the then Prime Minister's mistake on Iraq flowed from a “black-and-white” world view that was

“more evangelical than the American ... Right”.

That damning account, which is backed by White House staffers of the time, removes any lingering shadow of doubt that Tony Blair's weapons of mass destruction claims were falsehoods designed as a ruse and a deception. Most indefensible of all was the justification of war on Iraq on the basis that it would reduce the likelihood of a terrorist attack even though, as we now know, intelligence services were saying exactly the opposite at the time.

We should acknowledge those who took an honourable position in the Government of the day. The late Robin Cook, Lord Hunt, John Denham, Bob Blizard and Anne Campbell all resigned from the Government and voted against military action 10 years ago. We should also remember that, in his personal statement to the House of Commons at the time, the then former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook touched on the issue of Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction, saying that:

“Iraq probably has no weapons of mass destruction in the commonly understood sense of the term—namely a credible device capable of being delivered against a strategic city target.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 17 March 2003; Vol 401, c 727.]

If Robin Cook knew that, as he resigned from the Government, the weapons of mass destruction did not exist, why did not the Prime Minister, who was acting on the same information, also know?

Let me acknowledge the position of others, such as the principled position taken by Charles Kennedy, the then leader of the Liberal Democrats, who expressed concerns about the legitimacy of military action being taken outwith a further Security Council resolution.

Let us remind ourselves of the central fact that we fought the war because of an arsenal of weapons that proved to be non-existent. Many thousands of people paid with their lives for that deception. The illegality of the war in Iraq is a disgrace without parallel in modern times. The shame of it will echo down the ages for Mr Blair and all those who were complicit in sending young men and women to risk their lives on the basis of a gigantic fraud.

Sending armed forces into the front line is the most serious and significant choice that any nation can make. I think that it is inconceivable that, if deciding on such things for ourselves in our Parliament, we would have possibly made such a decision. It is true that this Parliament narrowly voted against an anti-war amendment 10 years ago. It is also true that, by a very narrow majority, Scottish members in the House of Commons voted in favour of the conflict. However, it is inconceivable that that decision making was not based on the loyalty of some people towards their Prime Minister and their party, as opposed to a genuine estimation of the reasons for going into conflict. It is inconceivable that any Parliament—in this place—charged with the defence of this country would have possibly voted to take this country into that illegal conflict.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): Although I agree that no Parliament should lend a hand to that, does the First Minister agree that a great number of people whose loyalty was found to be too strong to the wrong source were severely tested, and that we should feel a wee bit sorry for them now because they know they were wrong?

The First Minister: I basically believe that to be case.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the First Minister give way?

The First Minister: I will answer Margo MacDonald first and then I will gladly give way to Johann Lamont.

I was not in this place; I was in the House of Commons. I know people who agonised over their loyalty to their Government and their thoughts and conscience about voting in favour of an illegal conflict. I suspect that that was the same in this place, too. Perhaps we will find out from Johann Lamont.

Johann Lamont: The First Minister ought not to describe other people's motives in relation to how they vote in this place. I say for the record that when I voted as I did, I voted on the grounds of listening to the evidence in front of me and my conscience. It does him—or anybody else—no service to suggest that when people disagree with him, it is because they are obliged to do so.

The First Minister: I read the debate. I remember that, according to the record, Johann Lamont was first up to advocate the war and question those who were arguing against it. Perhaps I can offer conclusive evidence on that very point. In that same debate, the then First Minister, Lord McConnell, summing up on the side of those who were going to vote against John McAllion's amendment—his final appeal to gather support in this place—said:

"When our Prime Minister has recognised public concern and has moved to ask the UN to give Saddam Hussein one last chance, we should not undermine his efforts".—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2003; c 16432.]

In other words, the then First Minister's last appeal to gather support was for support for the Prime Minister. Incidentally, we note that that support was

"to give Saddam Hussein one last chance"

to stay in power, rendering rather foolish the suggestions that, 10 years later, the war can be justified on the removal of Saddam Hussein when, 10 years ago, people tried to justify it on weapons of mass destruction that did not exist.

Johann Lamont should, instead of following the lesson from Tony Blair 10 years ago, perhaps join her current leader or the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, who have recanted their support for war and who have accepted that the case was never made and that they were wrong to support it. I see Johann Lamont shaking her head. Does she want me to read out Lord Prescott's remarks about why he was wrong to support the conflict?

At some point, I hope that Johann Lamont and the remaining 23 members of this Parliament of 129 who, for one reason or another, were misled into supporting an illegal conflict with incalculable consequences will, perhaps by voting for the motion today, find in themselves the courage and integrity to admit that mistake to the Scottish people.

We should reflect on what happened 10 years ago, for the best possible reason: to ensure that it cannot happen again. We should reflect that this Parliament—our Parliament, our nation's Parliament—should take such decisions on behalf of the people. We should ensure that there is genuine parliamentary debate, with proper information coming before the Parliament before a decision is taken to take the country into conflict.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the First Minister give way?

The First Minister: No.

We should reflect on the best way to fulfil our obligation, as good international citizens, to participate fully on the world stage—[*Interruption.*] I hear the member saying that this is a joke. Let him speak and see how funny it is that people died because of his votes in this Parliament.

Lewis Macdonald: Perhaps the First Minister, in his tone of considered reflection on the events of the past 10 years, will tell us why he believes that an independent Scotland as he perceives it would have access to better intelligence and a greater understanding of international events than the United Kingdom would have. If he has no such

argument, why does he make the case that a Scottish Parliament would be capable of more informed or better decisions than any other Parliament?

The First Minister: Because, as we know, the Prime Minister of the day distorted the intelligence that he had. We know that intelligence was presented that we were 45 minutes from attack, when no weapons existed. We know that the late Robin Cook knew that weapons of mass destruction did not exist. We are not the only Parliament and the only country; the member should reflect on the countries that refused to enter the conflict, precisely because they had intelligence to the contrary and because they believed in the rule of law and in upholding the United Nations—something in which the member's party once believed but no longer does.

I saw the speech from the Prime Minister. I was in the debate, 10 years ago. The Prime Minister of the day was on excellent form. He swept his argument forward. He persuaded many people in the Labour Party to save their consciences and vote for him in the lobbies. However, we now know that that was based on a fraud and deception.

What possible excuse can the member have, 10 years later, when we know that weapons of mass destruction did not exist, for still defending taking the country into an illegal conflict, and not being prepared to say that?

This Parliament has the opportunity to correct the record, to state unequivocally that the Iraq war was wrong, and, above all, to look forward to the day when the democratic voice of Scotland takes decisions for the Scottish people on such matters and people can have confidence that this Parliament and this country will uphold the rule of international law.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the civilian, military and economic cost of the Iraq war and its aftermath; pays tribute to the armed forces and remembers the almost 5,000 allied servicemen and women and estimated 120,000 Iraqi civilians who lost their lives; notes that, 10 years on from the invasion, questions remain unanswered about the UK Government's decision to invade without a UN resolution, and believes that one of the key lessons of the Iraq war is the need for all nations, large and small, to conduct international affairs as cooperatively as possible according to international law and the authority of the United Nations and to act as good global citizens rather than engaging in reckless, illegal military conflicts with incalculable human and material costs.

14:38

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I begin by saying what barely needs to be said and pledging our unwavering support for UK personnel—military

and peacekeeping—who have served and continue to serve our country in Iraq and its regions. Their dedication to the United Kingdom and to the values and ideals that we hold so dear is something that not many members here would have the courage or conviction to emulate.

We heard the First Minister make his arguments, it seems without irony, but I am afraid that when it comes to this matter the Scottish National Party does not rise to the level that the people of Scotland and, importantly, the people of Iraq deserve. The First Minister's arguments might not have been flippant, but the clamour from his back benchers is surely frivolous.

When coalition forces entered Iraq 10 years ago, they found a country that had been brought to its knees by tyrannical rule of a kind under which no member here knows what it feels like to live. What did it feel like to live in a country in which 180,000 citizens had been slaughtered in the Kurdish regions in the north and where at least half that number had been slain in the Shia regions in the south? What did it feel like to live in a country where owning a satellite dish meant slow torture; where opposition to the President warranted execution; where the Government was so dedicated to the rule of brutality that it established an ad hoc executions committee as part of its campaign against its own population; where women were nothing more than chattels; and where religious, ethnic and political minorities were legitimate targets and dispensable citizens?

So grave and unimaginable was the Iraqi situation that as far back as 1999 the UN special rapporteur for Iraq warned that:

"The prevailing regime in Iraq has effectively eliminated the civil rights to life, liberty, physical integrity, and the freedoms of thought, expression, association and assembly."

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

John Lamont: I will give way later, but I want to make some progress.

I state at the outset that 10 years on, the situation in Iraq is far from ideal. Violence levels remain too high, political unrest is too common, and the persecution of religious and political minorities continues. Only today, we hear of bombings in Baghdad claiming at least 48 lives. Mr Salmond did not mention that, but I am sure that all members here condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

There is a possibility of delays to April's elections. However, Iraq has a democratic constitution now, and its people have exercised the most fundamental democratic right three times since 2005 by voting in elections. Almost \$1 trillion has been spent on reconstruction, building new

schools, hospitals and airports, and overseas investment in the economy increased by 40 per cent last year. We now see an Iraq where democracy is beginning to flourish, the economy is slowly prospering, civil society is beginning to blossom, and the rights and liberties of its citizens have a chance to regenerate—and all because Saddam Hussein is no longer there.

However, the quietism and opposition of those such as the SNP when it came to Iraq meant that for too long tyrannical rule of the most unimaginable kind continued. For too long, international words of condemnation were unmatched—

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way; resume your seat.

John Lamont: For too long, international words of condemnation were unmatched by meaningful international action; for too long, the Iraqi people suffered under the very sanctions that were supposed to protect them.

The First Minister: Will the member give way?

John Lamont: I will give way in a minute; let me finish my point.

For too long, Kurds in the north and Shias in the south continued to fight a tyrant whom we ourselves should have been fighting.

I give way to the First Minister.

The First Minister: Some of us who have consistently opposed Saddam Hussein's murderous regime over the years remember that Tory ministers visited him to talk about arms months after he slaughtered the Kurds. The casualty rate in Iraq is 300 a month at the moment, which is not really covered by the description "far from ideal". However, all of that being true, why did those supporting the war in Iraq say on the eve of war that Saddam Hussein could stay in power if only he would give up his weapons of mass destruction?

John Lamont: I did not say that. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

John Lamont: I do not dispute that the situation is far from ideal today, but it is improving and it is better than it was. If it were a choice between Saddam Hussein and freedom, the First Minister's choice might have been Saddam Hussein, but my choice would always be freedom.

It was essential that Iraq was removed from the sole ownership of Saddam Hussein and that its people were moved into a post-Saddam era. Saddam Hussein's Government was devoid of any

legitimacy and, on any measure, the state had lost its sovereignty. It had engaged in repeated aggressions against neighbouring states, on one occasion not only invading, but attempting to annex, an entire country as part of its empire. In its exhaustively documented Anfal campaign, Iraq violated the genocide convention—which, I remind the Parliament, the United Kingdom has signed. That campaign saw 180,000 innocent Kurds tortured, gassed and executed.

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

John Lamont: I give way to the minister.

Shona Robison: Is the member able to tell us who armed Saddam Hussein to use those weapons against his own people? Would he like to tell us that?

John Lamont: I am sure that Saddam Hussein had various sources of weaponry. That does not make it right that those actions were allowed to continue for as long as they were.

Iraq had been harbouring and giving aid to international terrorists, and it was a regime that paid bounties on the heads of Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel. It was a regime that had repeatedly used weapons of mass destruction on its own people as well as those in other territories; that had in the past actively attempted to conceal its weaponry; and that had repeatedly and flagrantly flouted internationally imposed sanctions on nuclear and non-nuclear proliferation.

When it came to weapons of mass destruction, Iraq was a latent, if not a patent, threat, but we can now say with certainty that it is no longer a permanent one.

Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a regime that was no longer entitled to the benefit of the doubt, and it was a country whose future could not be a matter of indifference to us, as it seemed to be for some members in this chamber.

Intervention was not only necessary—not only essential—but, because of Saddam Hussein's own record and decisions, inevitable. We brought to justice one of the world's greatest war criminals. We put him, as well as the perpetrators of the Anfal campaign, on trial, in a dock, and brought justice to the Iraqi people. Do the Scottish National Party and Alex Salmond think that that is nothing? We brought back to Iraq civil liberties, basic human rights and the entitlement to a Government that is elected by the people to serve the people. Do the SNP and Alex Salmond think that that is nothing?

Most of all, those of us who supported the intervention in Iraq, got to see what Christopher Hitchens described as

“what a people look like when it has been liberated”

and allowed to flourish. He said:

“there is no experience like that, no experience like the look on the face of a people who are no longer the property of a single party state.”

Only yesterday, I heard the words of Ali Al-Rikabi, a former soldier in the Iraqi army, who said:

“What took place in 2003 was a good thing ... Iraqis were crying for anyone to come and help them”.

We came forward. We no longer stood back and watched. We answered the cries of people such as that former Iraqi soldier. That is something that we can be proud of.

Some may not be so optimistic but, as I mentioned, what we saw in the years following the liberation of the Kurds from life at the mercy of Saddam Hussein, we are beginning to see now—slowly, but surely—in the rest of Iraq.

The First Minister has made much of the blunders, the mistakes and the catastrophes that we have seen—that we have made—in Iraq since 2003, none of which I deny, and most of which Iraqi citizens know more about than we could ever dare to imagine. However, none of them impeaches the principle and the fundamental idea that this was a necessary war, that it was an inevitable war and that, most of all, it was a just war.

I move amendment S4M-05981.2, to leave out from “; notes” to end and insert:

“, including 179 British armed forces personnel and MOD civilians; notes the human rights abuses exhaustively documented by the UN as well as other institutions that took place in Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein; notes the estimated 180,000 Kurds killed as part of the Anfal campaign, a systematic ethnic cleansing programme that took place between 1987 and 1989 under the orders of Saddam Hussein; notes the state killing of an estimated 100,000 Shia Muslims in the southern provinces during the 1991 uprising; notes the repeated violations by Saddam Hussein and his regime of numerous UN Security Council Resolutions, specifically Resolutions 678, 687 and 1441; believes that Saddam Hussein's regime was incompatible with basic democratic or humanitarian principles, and restates Scotland's commitment to supporting the development of a stable, prosperous and democratic future for all Iraqi people.”

14:48

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): When the sirens whined, we dived to the floor, struggling with our flak jackets and helmets, yet the local politicians carried on as if nothing had happened, despite the risk. They had become accustomed to the sirens and the missiles.

That was repeated over and over again during the three-day visit of the House of Commons Defence Committee to Basra, Umm Qasr and

Baghdad. During that visit, 40 missiles fell within range. Even the green zone in Baghdad was not spared the infringements. We were due to meet the Iraqi president, but his house had been hit that very day. The missiles were a normal, daily occurrence. They were a matter of fact.

That was in 2007—four years after Tony Blair and George Bush made that fateful decision to invade.

A few weeks after I visited Iraq, I was at the funeral of Scott Kennedy. He was a young soldier who died in Iraq, blown up by a roadside bomb. His funeral was in Oakley, in my constituency. The community turned out en masse to show their support for the family. They recognised the difference between the armed forces and the Government. They recognised the talent and commitment of their soldiers, but disagreed with the war.

A normal occurrence in Iraq, which happened every day of the week at the time, cost Scott Kennedy his life, and it cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, friends and relatives. We felt it in Fife that Scott Kennedy had lost his life, but in Iraq many others whom we did not know also lost their lives. Just today, another 48 people have died and scores have been injured in bomb attacks in Baghdad. The war cost us £1 trillion but, a decade on, Iraq is still rocked with instability and division. The war was based on a false premise. It was illegal, costly, bloody and just plain wrong. *[Applause.]*

Although I am proud that our party opposed the war, I am more ashamed that our country went to war in Iraq. It was a war that secured the support of the UK Parliament and this Parliament. I am ashamed that that happened, and of the intervention by the Labour Government, with the support of the Conservatives. I praise John Lamont for his contribution. I disagree with what he said, but I commend him for standing up and saying it because people need to hear why the case was made for the Iraq war.

Back in 1999, Tony Blair laid out new criteria for what he believed was humanitarian intervention. Those principles were not wrong; he just did not stick to them. His failure to adhere to those principles damaged not just the principles but, as we have heard, lives.

It is often said that countries, generals and leaders fight the last war rather than the next one. Decisions taken often reflect more the success or failure of previous conflicts rather than the special circumstances of the next. Iraq was affected by the success of Kosovo, Sierra Leone and, to a limited extent at the time, Afghanistan. However, failure in Iraq should not preclude future action elsewhere. It should not alter our collective

responsibility to support freedom and protect human rights around the world. Doing nothing can be as bad as cavalier adventurism. No war is ever won; it is just that some are less bad than others. However, always sitting on our hands can be even worse.

What tests, then, would we apply to future military action? If we are to have a serious debate, that is what we should focus on. I have four simple tests. The first is whether military action is legal under international law. Secondly, does it command local and regional support? That is also important. Thirdly, are we confident that it will alleviate suffering? Finally, and often most controversially, is the United Nations behind it, or, in the absence of that support, are there reasons to intervene on clear humanitarian grounds?

Those are the questions that we need to apply to future conflicts. In Libya, I would say that the limited special forces action and air strikes relieved suffering. We secured the support of Arab countries surrounding Libya. We also secured a strong mandate from the UN and our action was judged legal. I would say that it passed the test. We also passed the test in Mali.

Syria is the biggest test because the United Nations is clearly divided. With Russia standing firmly behind its ally, we have been limited to humanitarian aid. However, thousands of people are suffering and lots of people have died. Many more will die in future. The UK Government, along with many other European Union countries, has agreed to provide non-lethal equipment to the Opposition in Syria but has refused to rule out further support. It is a really difficult test. Do we stand aside when more people die in Syria? We need constantly to reapply the tests that I set out, which are whether we have regional support, whether action is legal and whether we have UN support.

I supported the 1 million British people who marched against the war in 2003. They were not duped by Saddam Hussein and his deception and cruelty, but what they could not understand was why the containment and deterrence approach was to be abandoned; nor did they accept that military intervention was justified. They did not believe that Saddam Hussein was a good guy. They believed that the measures that were being taken were sufficient at the time and they were not convinced of the need for military action. They feared the wider consequences in the middle east, for Israel and Palestine, but also for the Iraqi people. They were anxious about Bush adventurism and revenge for the perceived failures of his father. They were concerned by the actions of a seemingly overcompliant UK Administration that was too eager to please George Bush. It is a shame that this Parliament

and the Westminster Parliament did not listen to those people more carefully.

For Scott Kennedy and the hundreds of thousands of others who have lost their lives, it is imperative that we study our history and learn our lessons. That could be their legacy.

I move amendment S4M-05981.1, to insert after “UN resolution”:

“; regrets the decision of the Labour government, with the support of the Conservatives, to press ahead with the invasion despite considerable opposition and many warnings about the danger of armed conflict; is of the view that the intervention was illegal under international law”.

14:55

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):

Listening to the speeches of John Lamont and Willie Rennie, I was struck by the seriousness with which they have engaged in reflecting after 10 years. I am deeply disappointed that the First Minister has chosen simply to turn this into an argument for independence. He made the point himself. He said that the argument for independence is that we would not have done what happened 10 years ago. The issues are far more serious than that.

The 10th anniversary of the start of the Iraq war is an opportunity to reflect on many issues: the bravery and sacrifice of our armed forces; the impact of conflict on civilians; the role that our international institutions can and should play in tackling conflict in the world; and how we protect the world's citizens from fascist and despotic rule.

It must, too, be an opportunity to applaud those who now seek the reconstruction of Iraq and an opportunity for us in this Parliament to commit to do what we can to support our armed forces and our veterans, who too often bear the mental scars of time in conflict.

Iraq is one of the most difficult issues that I have ever had to address and, frankly, I did not require a debate in this place to reflect on it. As a politician, someone interested in how political power is used and abused and someone who, like everyone in here, yearns for a more stable and equal world, I believe that we must reflect on the lessons of Iraq.

I am genuinely disappointed that the First Minister did not take the option of a debate without a motion, so that we could come together genuinely to wrestle with the challenges that the Iraq war and the important issues of intervention and tackling human rights abuses and fascism present. The Labour party will abstain from the vote on the motion and the amendments.

In preparation for the debate, among other things I read again the debate in the Scottish

Parliament in early 2003. In reading my speech, I was struck by the troubled view that I had about what option should be taken. That uncertainty was reflected in debates across the country; it was not particular to this place. The debate at that time divided families—it divided mine; it divided parties, although not, apparently, the SNP; and it divided communities. That was a division not between the peace lover and the warmonger, the good and the bad, the pro-Blair and the anti-Blair, the pro-American and the anti-American; it was a division about what, on balance, people believed to be the better thing to do—not the right thing or the wrong thing, but the better thing to do in the most difficult of circumstances. I have always respected the views of those who did not agree with me then. I respected their views then and I respect them now. I ask only that people believe that those who in the end supported the war did so with the best of motives and not the worst.

Jim Eadie: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr Eadie, please sit down. The member is not taking the intervention.

Johann Lamont: My position ahead of the invasion was always under revision. I would describe it in this way. Having, as a young woman, opposed the first Gulf war and watched the slaughter of the Kurds by an emboldened Saddam Hussein when Bush stopped at the border, my thinking was focused on how we protected ordinary Iraqi people from torture, abuse and genocide. I found Ann Clwyd MP's position compelling. Over a number of years, she fought internationally for recognition of the abuse of the Kurds and what was happening to them.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Will the member give way on the human rights point?

Johann Lamont: Ann Clwyd argued that the scale of the terror that the Kurds faced meant that international action was needed and could not wait.

Christina McKelvie: I thank Johann Lamont for giving way on that point. I do not doubt for a second her commitment to human rights. However, she said that action was supported with the best of motives. If the motive for regime change concerned human rights, why is there harassment on the street, restriction of movement, sexual assault, domestic violence and the new Iraqi penal code, which allows husbands to discipline their wives by any means? The poorest women and girls are being exposed to trafficking. That is Iraq today and that is not what I expect you to support, Ms Lamont.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please speak through the chair.

Johann Lamont: I will never support and have never supported the kind of abuses that you describe. My point is that Ann Clwyd MP made the point 10 years ago that these people could no longer wait. She did not rush to judgment; she did not want the Iraq that you describe and she is deeply committed to human rights. It is offensive to suggest that we do not agree with you on what happened 10 years ago; we want such a conclusion now.

The interesting thing for those who said that action should wait is that sanctions were not working. Many who opposed intervention also opposed sanctions. For me, the debate was never about weapons of mass destruction; it was about humanitarian action and the importance of addressing such concerns. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Margo MacDonald: Sanctions were opposed because children were being denied medical attention and so on.

Johann Lamont: I agree with you. It reflected the obscenity that Saddam Hussein was that he was prepared to take that approach against his own people.

I believed that action needed United Nations endorsement and I was and am on record as saying that, if that endorsement had not been forthcoming, I would have voted against the war if I had been in the House of Commons. However, if I am absolutely honest, given that my argument was based not on weapons of mass destruction but on Saddam Hussein's tyranny and what we did to the people of Iraq after the first Iraq war, I am still not certain what I would have done.

The First Minister: Will the member give way?

Johann Lamont: In the minute that I have left, I will comment on what the lessons are, if I am permitted to do so.

I am not a pacifist, but I think that we should have a more honest discussion and a better understanding about the grounds for going to war—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Johann Lamont: Willie Rennie's comments on that were important. Whatever position we take on Iraq or any international conflict, it should never be shaped by any party's judgment on its domestic political interests. The needs of those who are at the centre of the conflict must be the priority—not how it reads across international communities.

We need to reflect more deeply on the international community's role in policing human

rights abuses. If the argument is that a nation's boundaries cannot be violated—that was one of the most forcibly made arguments—what would or should we have done if Hitler had had no territorial ambitions?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Lamont, will you come to a conclusion?

Johann Lamont: We must ask the questions. What do we say about Kosovo, Chile and the Falklands? What do we say now about Syria?

I will finish on a point that Willie Rennie made and which should be reinforced. How do we ensure that the result of the Iraq war is not that tyrants can rest easy and that the international community settles for paralysis because the most powerful nations always assess first their direct interest and retreat from their international responsibilities? If the message of the Iraq war is that the international community stands back from its responsibilities to tackle human rights abuses, that will be the worst lesson of all. I hope that, in our reflections 10 years on, we all understand the seriousness with which we must all tackle such grave issues of protecting the rights and dignities of individuals around the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. Speeches should be of six minutes, although we have very little time for interventions. I remind members to speak through the chair and to call each other by their full names, please.

15:04

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Ten years on from the beginning of the war in Iraq, the words of Tony Blair that it was our "finest hour" ring as hollow and false as they did on the day that they were uttered. I will address the grave accusations at the feet of the Blair Government that the war was not only illegal in international law—I say in passing that regime change per se is illegal in international law—but proceeded on the foundation of flimsy and, as we know from last night's "Panorama", falsified intelligence; that many in the intelligence services across many countries knew that to be the case and said so to those who mattered; that the decision to support a gung-ho US President with an election to face, Stetson on, holster strapped and guns loaded, had been made by Blair on a visit to Camp David before any dossier, dodgy or otherwise, had made an appearance in any of its draft forms; that no post-invasion plans had been given any considered thought; and that it was done not in the name of democracy—Saddam Hussein was not only an old ally of the US but a good customer—but for oil.

It was “illegal”—that is not my word, but the word of Kofi Annan and Hans Blix. It was illegal without a second UN resolution sanctioning intervention—that was originally the opinion of Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General under Tony Blair. How do I know? A memo written on 14 January 2003 that was released under the orders of the cabinet secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell stated:

“my opinion is that resolution 1441 does not revive the authorisation to use of force ... in the absence of a further decision of the Security Council.”

The memo also made it clear that Lord Goldsmith found the arguments in favour of a war without the UN resolution “unconvincing”. Later, that was—how shall we say it?—modified.

The intelligence that there were weapons of mass destruction, including mobile chemical weapon capabilities, was produced by a man whom the German intelligence service regarded as unreliable and was easily disproved by aerial photographs, while evidence from much more serious sources was discounted. Why? Because, come hell or high water, the facts had to be stretched to fit a political decision that had already been taken. Even just before the invasion, Hans Blix declared that there were no weapons of mass destruction to be found. David Kelly, a chemical weapons expert who discounted the existence of chemical weapons, was found dead after brutal questioning by a Westminster committee.

As for the warning that weapons could be directed at the west within 45 minutes, everybody who knew anything—and there were lots of such people—knew that that was arrant nonsense. Nothing—not even a million marching against the war—could get in the way of Blair's determination to give a US President cover. War had been declared long before intelligence was gathered and dossiers were published. It was a bullish Bush agenda. Blair must have turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to anything that got in the way of supporting that agenda. No wonder that the Chilcot inquiry is being muzzled where it matters.

What had Blair promised Bush at Camp David? What was the deal? After 9/11, Bush lumped Hussein into the same camp as al-Qa'ida, although the Iraqi President was at the other end of the religious spectrum, and in true Hollywood tradition pronounced an “axis of evil”. It all culminated in the hauling down of that monstrous statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad—an iconic moment that was beamed round the world. The US had ridden to the rescue and the white hats had won. Job done.

Remarking on the looting and chaos that followed, as there was no plan to keep policing or Government structures in place, Rumsfeld said, “Stuff happens”. The innocent who died or who were mutilated by the bombing were just

“collateral damage”. No wonder Sir Mike Jackson, the head of the Army at the time, was to describe Rumsfeld as “intellectually bankrupt”. Lord Dannatt, who succeeded Jackson, said:

“the real failure was the failure to plan properly”.

He added:

“Into the power vacuum created, al-Qaida and others moved”.

What an irony.

So the 2003 invasion was not for democracy and it had nothing to do with 9/11—it was for oil. Before the invasion, Iraq's domestic oil industry was fully nationalised and closed to western companies. Ten years on, it is largely privatised and dominated by foreign firms, including Halliburton, the Texas-based firm that Dick Cheney ran before becoming George W Bush's running mate in 2000. It is no accident that Exxon, Chevron, BP and Shell spent more money to get Dick Cheney and George W Bush elected in 2000 than they had spent in previous elections.

Almost \$1.2 billion in revenues from contracts related to Iraq in the third quarter of 2006 led one analyst to comment:

“Iraq was better than expected ... Overall, there is nothing really to question or be skeptical about. I think the results are very good.”

No, it was not done in our name. Tony Blair was complicit in the crime. Nor was it in the name of the millions who marched, or the thousands of soldiers, or the tens of thousands of Iraqis who died. It was in the name of oil, big oil.

15:10

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I usually start my speeches in the chamber by saying that I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and, to be honest, looking at the title of this afternoon's debate “10 Years on from the Invasion of Iraq”, I continue to do so. However, I fear that it would have been more appropriate to name the debate “10 Years on from the last debate in the Scottish Parliament on Iraq”. I fear that the purpose of the debate is to allow SNP speakers to rehearse the same arguments that they deployed 10 years ago and rerun the vote, rather than speak about the situation in Iraq 10 years on.

Members might wonder why I have those fears, but they need only to take a quick glance at the SNP website and the press release on today's debate to see why. The press release demands apologies and explanations from individuals who took part in the debate 10 years ago, instead of focusing on the real issues that face Iraq 10 years on. The title of the SNP press release speaks for itself:

“SNP mark 10 years since Holyrood Iraq debate”.

Are members so full of their own self-importance that we have to have a debate to mark the anniversary of a debate, rather than speak about the real issues facing another country and its people? I find it unbelievable that this is happening on the same day on which a foreign leader has spoken to the Parliament about the positive contribution that Scotland has made to her country. If the debate descends into going over all the same ground that was discussed 10 years ago—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mark Griffin: —we will have missed an opportunity to state our support for the families of those soldiers and Iraqi civilians who lost their lives, to state our support for the troops who have returned to Scotland and are coping with issues relating to combat stress, and to talk about Iraq 10 years on from the invasion. We will have missed the opportunity to talk about what our country can do to contribute to the regeneration of Iraq, how we can support its citizens to make them feel more confident and secure in their country and with their country's place in the world, and how we can support Iraq, as a new democracy, by offering advice from another relatively new Parliament and Government.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I appreciate Mr Griffin taking my intervention. What has happened to the Christian, Yazidi, Mandaean and other religious minority communities in Iraq during the 10 years since the invasion?

Mark Griffin: I am not saying that the situation in Iraq is perfect. It is unacceptable. A sectarian war is on-going; it reached its height in 2006, and I will come on to talk about that. I do not think that even the most ardent supporter of the invasion of Iraq would consider the situation today to be acceptable, but not even the most vocal critics would say that there have been no improvements in the country since the invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.

There have been improvements, although their pace has been far from that which was promised at the time of the invasion. Kenneth Gibson raised the issue of sectarianism, which has blighted Iraq. Although we are no longer at the height of the violence as it was in 2006, far too many people die every week in attacks motivated by religion, and we have seen news of more deaths today.

I grew up with more awareness of the situation in Iraq than that of most people my age. My mum had a childhood friend called Mae who was an Iraqi. It is hard to imagine that someone who grew up in the streets of Dennistoun in the 1960s would have an Iraqi best friend, but there we go. Mae

had to move back to Iraq when she was young and my mum would often talk about her friend whenever there were reports about Iraq on the news.

My mum would often wonder whether Mae was still alive and hoped that she would be okay, since Mae's family was full of academics, who were considered a threat to the regime. Mae survived and was able to move back to the UK after the Iraq war. She got back in touch with my mum and has spent the past two Christmas holidays with my family in Scotland. She has spoken at length of the conditions that the Iraqi people lived in under Saddam and about how things are now for the members of her family who still live there.

Mae has spoken about the sectarian violence that plagues the country; the number of people who are living in poverty; the power supply issues; and the issues around access to clean water. Those are the issues that should dominate the debate. How can we, as a country, support Iraq to address some of those issues and help boost the confidence and pride in the country that is clearly evident from Iraqi people I have spoken to and that has been displayed in a number of documentaries and newspaper features marking the anniversary of the war?

Air links to Iraq are still not well developed—it is only a matter of weeks ago that Iraqi Airways flew its first London to Baghdad flight, connecting the Iraqi capital with one of the largest Iraqi populations outside the country. Grid electricity is supplied for only around 12 hours a day—in an energy-rich nation—because of slow progress in rebuilding power stations. The promised construction boom, which was supposed to kick-start the regeneration of much of the country that was affected by the war, is still at the planning stage.

The situation for Iraqi citizens as regards security is clearly not acceptable, but it is improving. Citizens now have access to mobile phones and the internet for the first time and it is right that we should mention these things, but 10 years on from the invasion of Iraq, the focus must be on how we can support the continued regeneration of the country and its people.

15:16

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): On 15 February 2003, we marched. My son and I marched together with more than 100,000 people in Glasgow to declare that the war that was being planned would not be in our name. Millions marched in the rest of these islands and around the world. People marched with family, with friends, with neighbours and with strangers who would become their friends, on a day that was not

without hope. We hoped that the people would not be ignored when they said, "Not in our name," in such vast numbers. Naively, I believed that the Westminster Parliament would say no to an illegal war and thwart the warmongers Blair and Bush.

On 13 March 2003, as others have said, we debated the prospect of the invasion of Iraq in this Parliament. There were some notable speeches that day. In particular, I recall the intellect and passion of George Reid. "War looms as Prime Minister prepares to bypass United Nations" he said, and went on to say:

"The war has already claimed its first victim, which is the truth."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2003; c 16446.]

How prophetic were his words: we learned later that the rationale for war had been built on a grossly sexed-up dossier regarding the claimed existence of WMD.

On Tuesday 18 March 2003, the Westminster Parliament, on the back of a case that was deliberately fabricated by the Labour Government, gave the go-ahead for war. On 20 March, the invasion began and the horror that was to become known as "shock and awe" unfolded.

The television pictures emanating from Baghdad at the beginning of that horror will stay with me forever—watching the bright yellow and orange flashes of missiles and bombs falling in the sure and certain knowledge that innocent people were being killed and maimed. Blair and Bush will never be forgiven for what they unleashed that night and for what was to follow.

Sami Ramadani, a political refugee from Saddam's regime, wrote a heartfelt and powerful column in *The Guardian* recently. He said:

"Ten years on from the shock and awe of the 2003 Bush and Blair war—which followed 13 years of murderous sanctions, and 35 years of Saddamist dictatorship—my tormented land, once a cradle of civilisation, is staring into the abyss."

He went on to say:

"Blair, whom most Iraqis regard as a war criminal, is given VIP treatment by a culpable media ... It enrages us to see Blair build a business empire, capitalising on his role".

Although the perpetrators of an illegal war have yet to pay the price, as we have already heard, at least 120,000 people have lost their lives and countless numbers have been maimed physically and psychologically.

As we know, that number includes the 179 servicemen and women from these islands who paid the ultimate price. Of course, the war has not been consigned to history, as the dead are still being counted. The explosions and shootings continue to kill the innocent.

It is the innocent to whom I now turn, and the impact on the children of that region. The children of Iraq have been grossly denied even their most basic rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The convention is clear about the need to protect children's rights to life and to physical, mental, moral and spiritual development in a safe environment, but the reality is that children, along with the rest of the population, have been subjected to grave human rights violations.

As a result of the occupying powers' policies, the social fabric of the country has been changed. Divide-and-rule tactics along ethnic and sectarian lines were used to break up the country as the occupiers failed to contain insurgents. Indiscriminate bombing of residential areas destroyed purification systems and health and educational facilities. The institutional arrangements that should have protected the social and legal rights of women, youths and children are dysfunctional and unreliable.

The consequences of that have left children vulnerable and exposed on numerous levels. The killing, maiming, kidnapping, human trafficking, recruitment by armed groups, child labour and deprivation of liberty go on. The effects of infrastructure destruction, the release of toxins into the soil, air and water, and contamination from depleted uranium go on. The increase in levels of cancer, childhood leukaemia and birth defects goes on. Around 1.5 million children under the age of five are malnourished, so the hunger goes on. Children under the age of 14 make up 25 per cent of the victims of landmines and explosive war remnants, and the killing and amputations go on.

I know that John Lamont spoke with sincerity, but that is the reality of Iraq today. The horror for the children of Iraq goes on because, in their vanity, Bush and Blair tried to use their power to shape a new world order.

John Lamont: The member has made much of what is happening in Iraq. I fully acknowledge that the situation is far from ideal, but he has made no mention of what happened previously under Saddam's horrific Government. Is he really saying that, if given the choice between where we are today and where we were then, he would choose where we were then?

Bruce Crawford: I say to John Lamont that it is not possible to change history. The reason for the invasion of Iraq was not Saddam's treatment of his people or regime change; the case was built on weapons of mass destruction, which were non-existent. John Lamont might hold his view about what happened sincerely, but I believe that it is an excuse for what happened rather than the reason for what happened.

In 2003, we marched and said, “Not in our name,” yet Westminster sanctioned an illegal war. Other members have said that it is dreadful to mention the word “independence” in the debate, but I sincerely hope and pray that in 2014 Scotland will vote for independence to ensure that when the people say, “Not in our name,” their voice will never again be ignored.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Time is becoming a bit tighter.

15:23

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): If a week is a long time in politics, 10 years ago can sometimes feel like yesterday.

Across the chamber, we will all be acutely aware of the division that the decision to invade Iraq caused, and none of us will have difficulty recalling our emotions and our opinions on what happened. That has been brought into sharp focus by this morning’s events in Iraq. The motion talks about the tribute that we should pay to all those who lost their lives in the conflict, and members on all sides of the chamber do that. The number of dead and wounded have been added to today and since the end of UK combat operations. Our thoughts should be with the families of those individuals. The real lives and deaths of people like us should be what we remember today, not justifications, recriminations or the politics, particularly of the Scottish Parliament.

Like others, I have some doubts about the motivation behind the debate, to which I will return towards the end of my speech.

I did not support the war in Iraq, but I do not believe that we should be trading our positions on the events of a decade ago or those of 25 years ago in Halabja. Here and now, we have responsibilities and opportunities.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): On responsibilities, Tony Blair is in the member’s party. Is it not time that the member took responsibility and got him out of his party?

Drew Smith: I think that Bruce Crawford put this well when he said that we cannot rewrite history.

I said that I wanted to talk about the opportunities and responsibilities that we have now and I think that Mark Griffin was right to talk about the actions that we can take to support the people of Iraq. In this debate, that sentiment is the right one. I would add that we also need to take the opportunity that we have been given in the debate to think about how we support the veterans of the invasion of Iraq: those who went from our country, not of their own will but at the command of others. Many of them paid a heavy price and

they, like us, will have a plurality of views on their experience and their contribution.

Men and women from every part of Scotland—many from my own city of Glasgow—served in Iraq and are now back among us. The first Gulf war raised awareness of veterans’ issues because of the lack of support provided to those who returned. Despite the divisions that ran—and run—deep across Britain on the issue, we are able to unite on the respect and admiration that are due to ex-servicemen and women.

According to Poppyscotland, a number of challenges face veterans, which I think we in the chamber can and should focus on. I was surprised by the points that I am about to make when I first learned of them. I highlight them not in any way to make a point about the Scottish Government, because I recognise that work is continuing on the issue, and I hope that the designation of a minister with responsibility for veterans brings focus to it—I am sure that it does. However, compared with veterans in England and Wales, veterans living in Scotland are 10 per cent more likely to be homeless, 8 per cent more likely to suffer from mental health problems, 5 per cent more likely to have financial problems, 5 per cent more likely to be in prison and 3 per cent more likely to suffer from alcohol problems.

None of those things can be about a border, and I do not believe that they can be about a difference in the level of care that Scots have or that the Scottish Government provides. However, those figures demonstrate that, whether because of the places and circumstances that we recruit from in the first place or for other reasons, the challenge that we face in Scotland is greater.

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): I am given to understand that the member intends to abstain on the vote on the motion, but would he care to refer to it and tell us whether or not he is completely agnostic about whether it was right to go ahead with the war on the premise given for it by the Prime Minister at the time?

Drew Smith: I have said that I was against the war. I genuinely do not feel any need to justify my position on the war in Iraq to the member or to anyone else in the chamber. The motion before us refers to learning the lessons of Iraq, and I am trying to demonstrate something that we could take from it and learn and that we have responsibility over.

We know that, before the invasion of Iraq, we failed to plan properly for reconstruction. Many things there have improved, not least because of the removal of Saddam, but it remains the case that people there continue to suffer because what would happen afterwards was not a big enough

part of the consideration when the debate raged here and around the world about what would happen next.

What happens afterwards for military personnel is something that we need to mainstream, not just in the run-up to or aftermath of conflict. Support services for individuals may be required for significant periods of time and we must maintain capacity to provide help when it is needed. Smaller measures—gestures of respect—are also important. In Glasgow recently, for example, there was a debate in the city chambers on a proposal, which I think was made by an SNP member, that veterans should have concessionary access to public transport as of right. That is a really small effort but, if it was implemented, it might assist with employability for some of them. More than that, for all of them it is just a tiny token of gratitude for service given.

On all the issues facing veterans in Scotland today, whether they served in western Europe, Korea, Afghanistan or Basra in Iraq, as my cousin did, I hope that we will use the 10th anniversary of division over conflict to resolve unity on what we can do for those among us who deserve, and should expect, our support.

I said earlier that I did not have any illusions about why we are having this debate in this place today, and I think that the politics of today are being played out here as much as those of a previous time. However, in the few moments that I have left for my speech I want to return to the Scottish Government motion before us.

I whole-heartedly agree that we should record our tributes to those who paid the costs of Iraq, whether they are our own countrymen or the people of Iraq. I wanted to speak today in order that my name be recorded in the *Official Report* of this debate and to raise concerns about those who live around us in Scotland who continue to be affected. However, a difficulty is posed for me by the motion's final clause, which seems to suggest dismissively that those with whom I disagreed about the need for military action were somehow "reckless"—or feckless—in their actions or their motivations.

What I know and remember is that military action in Iraq divided us before it began, it divided us when it was happening and it continues to divide us today. That division beset families, parties, countries and Parliaments. I have to say that retrospective moral certainty or attempts to exploit that argument for whatever purpose are ill judged, if not a folly in themselves.

15:30

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I would like to take the opportunity to remember

those from all sides who lost their lives as a result of the invasion of Iraq.

Drew Smith mentioned the motion and, funnily enough, I was going to draw that to members' attention, as the Labour Party said that it was going to abstain. I think that Drew Smith made a good point, but the part of the motion that he picked up on is about the need

"to act as good global citizens rather than engaging in reckless, illegal military conflicts with incalculable human and material costs."

I cannot understand how anyone could not vote for that. In the motion, we are talking exactly about the need

"to act as good global citizens".

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I also voted against the war in Iraq, but unlike many in the chamber I have actually been to Iraq since the war. I would like to know what you have actually done to improve the lives of Iraqi citizens today.

Sandra White: In the debate I do not have the time to tell you everything that I have done for Iraq, but it includes fundraising and speaking to people. As you come from Glasgow, you will have realised that we have many Iraqi refugees who are in Glasgow because of the illegal war in Iraq and who are still suffering. I would like Hanzala Malik to remember that.

It is rather ironic that dictators such as Pinochet, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi were all right when they were your—the Opposition's—dictators; they were good dictators then. Then, all of a sudden, they changed to bad dictators and we had the illegal war in Iraq. That is something that you should remember.

Johann Lamont: I do not think that it helps the debate to say what you have just said. Many, many people in here and beyond fought Pinochet and fought the Scottish team going to play in Chile. Scotland has a very proud record on that. It does not help to suggest that somehow other folk in here have less compassion than you do.

Sandra White: I never said that, Ms Lamont. It beggars belief that you think that you have the right to say what you want to say, yet we do not have the right to say that the war was illegal. I think that you should think about that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sandra White should speak through the chair, please.

Sandra White: The dodgy and discredited dossier that was used by Tony Blair to justify the illegal war, the accusations of war crimes against Tony Blair and the continuing suffering of the Iraqi people deserve to be debated. It serves this Parliament well and is a fitting testimony to this Parliament's maturity that we are having this

debate, even though Opposition parties did not want us to. It is shameful that Opposition parties tried to stifle the debate.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Sandra White: If you would just let me finish this point, please. The Labour Party can say what it likes, but it did not even have the courtesy to lodge an amendment. It did not want to take part in this debate at all and I would like to ask why that was.

To the credit of the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, they have lodged amendments. Although I have serious issues with John Lamont's utter refusal to address the issue of legality in his amendment, I welcome his contribution and the fact that he has lodged his amendment.

Johann Lamont's inability to put forward her party's view is pretty shameful. The Labour Party really needs to do some soul searching. It has moved so far from its founding principles that it is barely recognisable anymore.

We know that the Labour Party and Johann Lamont supported the Iraq war. However, millions of people in Scotland and throughout the world did not and they took to the streets in protest against it. With all the evidence that the Iraq war was illegal and that people are still suffering, I ask the Labour Party whether it still supports it. Do Labour members still support the fact that they voted for that war?

In her opening remarks, Johann Lamont said that we should talk of important issues. Does that mean that the issue that we are talking about—the illegal war—is unimportant? Fundamentally, I disagree with that. The questions that we are asking today are important; they should be asked and we should have answers.

Was the war illegal? Yes, it was. Without proper acknowledgement of that, we run the risk of simply accepting that illegal actions are part of our world today and are okay. We have already seen the consequences of that thinking, and they are making our world much more dangerous, rather than safer.

As was acknowledged by credible intelligence at the time, there were no weapons of mass destruction—others have said that—and the invasion would lead to a fracturing of Iraqi society and an upsurge in terrorism across the whole region. Surely we can all agree that that concern has been borne out on the ground. There has also been a huge increase in the use of torture and drone strikes, with a blatant disregard for international law. We really have to look at that.

Does silence imply complicity? Perhaps not, but by speaking out against what we believe to be

wrong, we send out a clear and unequivocal message that illegal wars will not be carried out in our name and that we will accept our duties under international law.

John Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Sandra White: I am sorry, but I do not have even a minute to finish what I want to say.

One of the main sources of information used to justify the war in Iraq was subsequently linked to the use of Scottish airports. They facilitated the transfer of interrogators to Egypt, where, through torture, a suspect claimed that Saddam Hussein and al-Qa'ida were in league in producing weapons of mass destruction. That claim was repeated by George Bush in October 2002 as a pretext for going to war in Iraq, and then by Colin Powell in front of the UN. Finally, it was parroted by Tony Blair.

In conclusion, I would like us to consider those rendition flights. We said in the Parliament that we would have an investigation into them, but we have not done so to date. I would like to think that we will have an investigation into the illegal war and the illegal rendition flights.

15:36

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): First of all, I should say that I am not a pacifist. I am not sure whether there is such a thing as a just war, but my opinion is that some battles need to take place for the good of humanity. However, 10 years ago, I marched in Glasgow to say, "Not in my name."

As a young loon, I went to the Cowdray hall lion in Aberdeen every remembrance Sunday. First, I went with my grandfather; I then went with the Boys Brigade, and then with the air cadets. For me at that time, I was showing my respect for the men and women who had fallen in wars that had long since happened. For a young boy in the 1970s and early 1980s, the first and second world wars and even the Korean war seemed like light years in the past.

In 1982, the remembrance ceremony was more poignant, as we thought of those who had been involved in the Falklands conflict. In recent times, the act of remembrance has changed dramatically, as we think of members of the armed forces who have given their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Cowdray hall war memorial, the MacRobert memorial garden and the many memorials in Duthie park in Aberdeen are now joined by Allan Douglas park, which was named after a young Northfield lance corporal who was killed in Iraq on 30 January 2006. Allan Douglas was on a routine patrol in Amarah when he was shot. Despite

receiving medical attention, he later died of his injuries.

This morning, I spoke to Allan's mother—Mrs Douglas—to seek her permission to speak about her son today. At the time, Mrs Douglas expressed her anger over the death of the son who

"just loved life, he just lived for life".

The Douglas family last saw Allan when he came home for Christmas. Mrs Douglas said:

"He did not want to go back this time—he'd seen enough the first time he was over. He said it was a waste of time people being there, he just really didn't like it at all."

She went on:

"I did not want him to go there at all—it wasn't his war. We were not very happy that he had to go there. I think it's a damn disgrace, they should not be out there at all. I do not think Tony Blair should have put any young kids out there—there's been so many of them killed."

Naming the park after Allan Douglas is a fitting tribute to a brave young man and his family from a community that shares their loss, but will never truly understand their pain.

Families, friends and communities in Aberdeen, right across these islands and around the globe have been touched by the war in Iraq. Many grieving parents, spouses and children find it difficult to comprehend why their loved ones were killed or maimed. Casualty numbers vary, but the costsofwar.org website states that there have been more than 189,000 direct war deaths, with at least 134,000 civilians killed. The website goes on to state:

"it would not be surprising if indirect death were 2 to 4 times the number of direct deaths due to violence - reaching as high as 536,000 indirect deaths over the 134,000 civilians killed directly by violence."

A 2011 survey conservatively estimated that between 800,000 and 1 million Iraqi children have lost one or both parents. Why?

The Guardian's coverage of the Chilcot inquiry on Tuesday 25 January 2011 stated:

"Two former cabinet secretaries – the country's most senior civil servants – mounted a devastating critique of the way Blair handled the run-up to war. The cabinet were trapped in a position where they had to agree to attack Iraq or bring down the prime minister, the inquiry heard."

Today's witnesses disputed Blair's claim to the inquiry last Friday that cabinet ministers might not have seen official papers but would have known about plans from the media. 'None of those key [Whitehall] papers were presented to the cabinet so I do not accept the former prime minister's claim they knew the score ... That isn't borne out by what actually happened,' said Lord Turnbull, then cabinet secretary.

Lord Wilson, his predecessor, told the inquiry that if asked whether there were 'proper cabinet' decisions in the run-up to war, he would say 'emphatically not'.

He said he remembered saying in March 2002, a year before the invasion: 'There is a gleam in [Blair's] eye that worries me.'

If only the Cabinet had had the guts to challenge Blair and to seek all the relevant information and MPs had taken a principled stand, we would not have had to face the unjust, illegal war in Iraq, which has led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqis; we would not be mourning the recent deaths of young service personnel at war memorials each November; and the Douglasses would still have their son, Allan.

15:42

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): On the morning of Saturday 15 February 2003, I travelled from Dundee down to Glasgow. On Buchanan Street, I joined the thousands-strong march of people as we made our way to the Scottish exhibition and conference centre to protest outside the Labour Party conference against the planned invasion of Iraq. "Not in my name."

That is why it is with deep regret that I speak in this debate. Today, the SNP is taking forward its agenda for the constitution in the names of the men, women and children—of Iraqis and members of military forces—who died in that conflict, and in the names of those of us who marched against it. That is the shame of today's Government motion. The referendum debate should certainly not be conducted in their names.

If an independent Scotland were to be a perfect country with a perfect and uncompromised foreign policy, that would be a first for any nation on this earth.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: No.

To give up our influence in the United Kingdom and not to take part in what were, in hindsight, the right foreign policy decisions that we have made in Britain, on fighting fascism and our opposition to Vietnam—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mark McDonald rose—

Jenny Marra: That is the debate that we should have. Such issues are never easy, and they never come with the benefit of hindsight, whether we mean a just war, an illegal war and those in between. I refer to the myriad of opinions on the first Gulf war, Kosovo and the independent Republic of Ireland's neutrality in the face of fascism.

The First Minister has already been in difficulty when faced with complex issues of international

diplomacy, with his refusal to welcome the Dalai Lama to Scotland and his unwillingness to raise human rights abuses with the Chinese Government on his trade missions. If the SNP is saying that we would have a better foreign policy if we were independent, we must debate that point seriously. I suggest to the SNP that that debate should take place in a positive manner and that it should set out an agenda for the future.

Mark McDonald rose

Jenny Marra: That campaign should take place in communities up and down this country because, in the meantime, this Parliament has a job to do in looking for solutions to the struggles that our communities face.

Mark McDonald: Will Jenny Marra give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McDonald, the member is not giving way.

Jenny Marra: The beginning and ending of, and the reasoning for any war are no causes for anything apart from sober remembrance and reflection. The time for political anger, arguments and recriminations over Iraq was 2003; it is not now. It is deeply disrespectful to those who have died to conduct the debate as the opening chapter of a week that is politically driving towards the announcement of the referendum date.

Mark McDonald: Jenny Marra contends that it is too soon to be having the debate. Does she not accept that for the hundreds of thousands of casualties it is not too soon, but far too late?

Jenny Marra: Mark McDonald is clearly not listening to what I am saying, which is that this is not an appropriate debate. If the SNP wants to set out its foreign policy agenda in an independent country, it should do so by looking to the future, and not do so in the names of people who died.

One glance at the First Minister's agenda for this week reveals a deeply cynical approach to the referendum, with debates on Iraq and Trident, then the announcement of the referendum debate on Thursday. I sound a note of caution to the SNP. Throughout the modern world, Scotland has been a stable society. Nobody knows why we did not experience the riots that beset England last year, but we were fortunate not to.

The First Minister: Does Jenny Marra accept that we are having the debate because it is the 10th anniversary of the Iraq war? She said that the debate on Trident is "cynical". Will she explain why a debate on Trident is not relevant to independence for Scotland?

Jenny Marra: I say to the First Minister that today's debate is the most cynical thing that I have ever seen in Scottish politics. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jenny Marra: To have this debate in this chamber while driving towards the announcement of the referendum date on Thursday is, as I said, deeply disrespectful—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should desist from shouting out across the chamber, please.

Jenny Marra: I will continue with the point that I was making. We were fortunate not to experience riots such as happened last year in England, but we should not be complacent. With youth unemployment at 25 per cent, underemployment rife, energy prices constantly rising, increasing numbers of homes in fuel poverty and food banks emerging in all our cities—one man had to walk 13 miles across Glasgow last week to get something to eat from a food bank—it is a foolhardy campaign and Government that seeks to divide opinion along such emotive lines.

None of us in the constitutional debate should be complacent about the stability of our country. The economic circumstances of Greece and Spain have led to unrest among young people.

Margo MacDonald: On a point of order.

Jenny Marra: I am saying this: a constitutional debate can be destabilising in itself, if it is not conducted in an extremely responsible way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Marra—I am sorry, but I must stop you. Margo MacDonald has a point of order.

Margo MacDonald: In fact, I want to give information. I lodged my motion because it is the 10th anniversary of the war in Iraq. That had nothing to do with cynicism, with the Government or with anything else.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. Christine Grahame has a point of order.

Christine Grahame: I seek the advice of the Presiding Officer. I think that the member is required to speak to the motion and the amendments that are before us. It is rather like listening to "Just a Minute"—the member is deviating.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is about to conclude. I will give her another 30 seconds in which to do so, because of the interruptions.

Jenny Marra: Our constitutional debate should be conducted on plans for the future. Both sides in the debate have oceans of space to set out a vision for the future of Scotland.

I suggest the following to the SNP: it has already secured the citizens of Scotland who will vote for independence because of the war in Iraq,

so please do not do a disservice to the hundreds and thousands of men, women and children who lost their lives in the Iraq conflict by playing out a constitutional debate in their names.

Sandra White: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Marra, you must finish. I have another point of order.

Kevin Stewart: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. I have a point of order from Sandra White.

Sandra White: I think that my point of order is similar to Christine Grahame's. What relevance did Jenny Marra's speech have to the motion? It had none at all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should make their speeches in relation to the matters under debate. The member referred to Iraq at the end and she has finished her speech. I will move on, unless anyone wants to make a different point of order. We are losing time from the debate.

Kevin Stewart: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The accusation was made that the debate is about the constitution. It is not; it is about 10 years of the Iraq war. I want it on the record that I did not mention the constitution in a single part of my speech. My speech was about families who have been affected by the war.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for your point of order, Mr Stewart. What we will perhaps do is check the record later to see whether members mentioned the constitution as part of their speeches. If they did so—*[Interruption.]* Order! It is entirely up to members how they frame their speeches around the motion. Let us move on, please.

15:51

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On 18 March 2003, the date on which the Westminster Parliament dragged us into an illegal war, I was in the House of Commons, because at the time I had the privilege of being the SNP MP for Perth. Like many MPs, I had watched for many months with increasing concern and, indeed, disbelief, as the warmongers in the Labour Government took us ever closer to war in Iraq.

In the debate in the House of Commons that day, it took the might of the renowned Blair spin team to spin its way round the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction, round the dodgy dossier, round the weapons inspectors' request for

more time and, crucially, round the lack of a UN mandate specifically authorising military action.

Neil Findlay: Will Annabelle Ewing give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I will not, at this point.

I recall, too, the jingoistic anti-French sentiment that suddenly crept along the new Labour benches that day as we heard that the French would not support action without a specific second UN resolution. Meanwhile, in the corridors of the Palace of Westminster during that long day and evening, it took the might of the Labour whips to strong-arm the waverers, in scenes that I thought were more reminiscent of a backroom bar than they were of the so-called mother of Parliaments.

Neil Findlay: Will Annabelle Ewing take an intervention on that point?

Annabelle Ewing: I will not. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, the member is not taking an intervention.

Annabelle Ewing: In the division lobby, however, it simply took supine subservience for the vast majority of Labour MPs, supported by the Tories, to troop through the "aye" lobby and inflict on the world the monumental foreign-policy disaster that was the Iraq war. Shame on them.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay! The member is not taking an intervention.

Annabelle Ewing: Shame on those MPs because—as we have heard—the cost of the illegal war in Iraq must be seen primarily in terms of the terrible loss of life. I pay tribute to our brave soldiers, who did their duty and fought with dedication and professionalism in a war in which their Government directed them to participate. Many did not return, and many who returned still count the cost. My thoughts are very much with them and their families today.

It is important that we ensure that the sacrifice of those soldiers is never forgotten; this debate affords this Parliament the opportunity to remember them, as we look to ensure that never again will we in Scotland be dragged into an illegal war, based on lies. I say to Jenny Marra, further to her extraordinary remarks this afternoon, that she might wish to examine her conscience and reflect on how she sought to drag the families of those brave soldiers into her political machinations.

We were served with lies by Tony Blair and his Labour ministers because, as we have heard, there were no weapons of mass destruction. If they really were the concern, why the rush to war? Why were the weapons inspectors not given more time, as they requested? Why did the UK

Government simply turn its back on the United Nations and the force of international law when its attempts to secure a second resolution were proving to be unsuccessful? Surely we can call that action reckless and illegal, as an outcome. It was not about clairvoyance and looking into a crystal ball; it was about looking at the evidence. That was the duty that we parliamentarians had to discharge.

As we have heard, in the run up to the start of the Iraq war 10 years ago hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland and in London took to the streets to say, "Not in my name", but their voices were simply ignored by the Labour Party. Last week we saw the unedifying spectacle of the Labour Party in this Parliament trying to shut down the debate today. Have they learned nothing from history? Do they wish to learn nothing from history? Perhaps it is implicit in their denial that they are culpable in the matter.

In conclusion, I say that I want never again to see my country being dragged into an illegal war such as Labour's war in Iraq. Let us be very clear; this was Labour's war. It was made possible by the character, nature and modus operandi of the Labour Party under the leadership of Tony Blair and—of course—its supine members of Parliament.

The constitution has been mentioned this afternoon, and it is entirely proper that we talk about that today and any day of the week in our Parliament, because the only way that we can ensure that Scotland will never again be dragged into an illegal war by a UK Government is to secure the normal powers of an independent country. It is only with independence that we can participate in the world in our own right and speak with our own voice.

Independence would also ensure that we, as a sovereign Parliament, could choose whether or not to send our young men and women into conflicts. Surely that is the better path for Scotland.

15:56

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): In 2003 I was working at *The Herald* newspaper in Glasgow, and one of my regular jobs as deputy editor was to conduct a picture conference in which we chose the best news photographs and placed them on the pages of the paper. During the Iraq war we saw many striking photographs that we could not use because they were just too terrible for publication; they showed the staring eyes of dead children, scattered body parts and dreadful intrusive human anguish.

However, sometimes we had to risk offending our readers to let them know the true pity of war.

When I saw the heartbreaking photograph of Ali Abbas, aged 12, I knew that it must be seen by as many readers as possible. His house and his parents were destroyed by an American bomb and a neighbour pulled him from the conflagration that followed. Both his arms were blown off and his thin torso was covered with burns, although a metal cradle had protected his body from contact. He was smiling. It is often said that Ali Abbas became the face of the war. Perhaps because of the allies' guilt and shame, or maybe because of the publicity, he received the best medical treatment, and so survived. He is now a tall and handsome 21-year-old living in England, who last year went back to Iraq to marry his childhood sweetheart.

It struck me that his personal story carries a parable of sorts about the war. Ali survived, as did his country. He is reconciled to his situation and holds no bitterness against those who so violently tore apart his body and his family. As Ali is, Iraq today is making the best of things, but that does not mend the damage to individuals like Ali and the hundreds of thousands who were killed, maimed, bereaved and displaced.

John Lamont quoted an Iraqi soldier who said that the 2003 invasion was correct. When he was interviewed by ITV last night, Ali Abbas said that despite the hopeful aspects of his personal story, he wishes that the invasion had never taken place. He believes that the war was wrong, as do most people. The Conservative amendment talks of Saddam's human rights record, which was, indeed, disgraceful, but—as has been made clear—that appalling human rights record was not the reason for the invasion. Saddam was told that if he got rid of his weapons of mass destruction there would be no invasion. The reason for the invasion was the alleged existence of those weapons, which as we all now know was a lie.

If human rights really were the reason for the invasion, in the interests of consistency we should have invaded Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya as well. Gaddafi and Saddam were both monsters, but one faced shock and awe and the other received a handshake in the desert. Saudi Arabia has one of the worst human rights records in the world—not least against the 50 per cent of its population who happen to be female—but although Tony Blair invaded Iraq, he dropped an investigation by the Serious Fraud Office into a corrupt arms deal involving Saudi Arabia. Amnesty says that in 2009 the Royal Saudi Air Force used

"UK-supplied Tornado fighter-bombers in attacks in Yemen which killed hundreds—possibly thousands—of civilians."

Things have not improved under the present UK Government. On a three-day visit to the region last year, David Cameron launched a major push to equip Gulf states with Typhoon fighter jets. However, just last week, the Saudi regime

executed seven men, despite protests that were voiced by the EU and the UN because of the belief that their confessions had been extracted under torture.

I think that, in 2003, there were people who convinced themselves that human rights justified the invasion and were thinking about the fate of the Kurds and the Shia Muslims in the south of Iraq. However, with hindsight and on reflection, I think that they should admit that the human rights justification for the invasion was inconsistent, inaccurate and immoral.

I have not visited Iraq, as some members in the chamber have, so I will conclude by quoting what Human Rights Watch's "World Report 2013" has to say about human rights in Iraq. It says:

"Human rights conditions in Iraq remain poor, particularly for detainees, journalists, activists, and women and girls. Security forces continued to arbitrarily detain and torture detainees, holding some of them outside the custody of the Justice Ministry. The Justice Ministry announced a record number of executions in 2012, but provided little information about the identities of those executed.

Iraq security forces continued to respond to peaceful protest with intimidation, threats, violence, and arrests of protesters and journalists. Security forces and pro-government non-state actors harassed journalists and media organizations critical of the government ... Hundreds of civilians and police were killed in spates of violence, including targeted assassinations, amid a political crisis that has dragged on since December 2011."

Two wrongs do not make a right. By resorting to violence, we immediately lose moral authority. That is a point that we should reflect on today.

16:02

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): The First Minister has told us that he has brought this debate to the Scottish Parliament in order that we may learn the lessons of the Iraq war. Unfortunately some—although not all—of the speeches from the Government seats, and of the attitudes of the Government party's back benchers suggest that, like many of the debates in this chamber, the Scottish Government's motion is motivated by a desire to denigrate the United Kingdom and to promulgate the case for independence. Bruce Crawford actually said that at the end of his speech.

If that is the purpose of the debate I find it, as Jenny Marra did, cynical and distasteful—

Bruce Crawford: Will Elaine Murray give way?

Elaine Murray: Because I mentioned Mr Crawford, I will give way.

Bruce Crawford: I think that I was quite clear when I said that I respect other people's views, and that I hope that they respect my view, which is that I sincerely believe that one way to sort out

matters like this in the future is independence. During the course of my speech, I covered significant ground in relation to the impact of the war on the people of Iraq. I hope that Elaine Murray will correct what she has just said.

Elaine Murray: I mentioned that Bruce Crawford spoke about independence; he is not the only person who has used the issue in that way. It is indeed distasteful that all the pain and suffering in that war could be used as a tool in what I see as the First Minister's increasingly desperate attempts to find a persuasive argument for independence. That is not about the rights and wrongs of the war; it is about how this debate is being used.

I know that the First Minister will not recall this—because he was not a member of this Parliament at the time—but after the debate on 13 March 2003, I broke the Labour whip. Like Kevin Stewart, I am not a pacifist, but I hate war and think that it should never be anything other than a last resort. Therefore, after much discussion with colleagues in my local party and with many constituents, I came to the view that there should be another attempt to resolve the crisis through the United Nations, so I voted for an option that was—if I remember correctly—put forward by the Liberal Democrats. I was a minister at the time and had therefore that morning written to the First Minister offering my resignation.

My decision was not universally popular with my constituents. Some thought that it was principled, but others saw it as self-indulgent and disloyal—particularly because this Parliament did not have responsibility for the decision to invade.

Margo MacDonald: I heartily endorse everything that Elaine Murray has said. Does she agree that my sentiments and the sentiments of Willie Rennie are based on an independent view of the motion, and not on the view that she alleges the Government has?

Elaine Murray: I am sure that Margo MacDonald will accept that I do not believe that she necessarily goes along with all the views of the SNP back benchers. I am not trying to attribute anything to her.

The war was not peaceful Scotland being dragged to war by the warmongering UK; we try to rewrite history if we believe that everyone in Scotland opposed the war. Many Scots supported it, especially in the early days after Saddam Hussein was overthrown. Many Scots were proud that UK forces had helped to oust from power a dictator who had perpetrated acts of extreme evil against his own people.

This month is not just the 10th anniversary of the Iraq war; it is the 25th anniversary of the poison gas attack by Saddam Hussein's regime on

the Kurdish town of Halabja, where some 5,000 people were killed. It is also 22 years this month since Iraqi helicopters mowed down Shiites and Kurds after the ceasefire at the end of the first Gulf war had been signed.

I did not easily disagree with my party's position on the Iraq war. Labour colleagues including Russell Brown in the UK Parliament also found that they were unable to support the Prime Minister. However, I believe that the decision to support the invasion was every bit as difficult to take.

I watched "Panorama" last night, which seemed to suggest that some members of the Central Intelligence Agency and MI6 were overinfluenced by false information that was given by people such as Curveball. Indeed, it was said that Tony Blair misled himself. I think that he did. I do not believe that Tony Blair, a father whose eldest child at the time was 19, callously sent young British service personnel to a conflict in which lives would be lost, or that he would have inflicted that most terrible of tragedies—the loss of a child—on other parents if he had not believed that he had no other option.

Christine Grahame: Will Elaine Murray take an intervention?

Elaine Murray: No. I have taken enough interventions.

I do not believe that the loss of civilian Iraqi lives that was bound to follow was of no consequence to Tony Blair.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: No. I have taken enough interventions.

I disagreed—I still disagree—with Tony Blair's decision to invade without UN approval, but I understand that those who supported it also did so after considerable thought and because they sincerely believed that it was the right course of action.

The history of Iraq since 1917 is one of conflict within the country, with its neighbours and internationally. The war that commenced 10 years ago deposed Saddam Hussein's tyrannical regime, but as we have heard, the country still has immense problems. Many organisations are working hard to regenerate the country. The lesson that we need to learn at international level is how best to support the Iraqi people.

As other members have said, many of our service personnel still bear the mental and physical scars of their involvement. We must learn how to offer support to them and to the bereaved families—of whom Kevin Stewart spoke—whose sons and daughters did not return.

Hard decisions will continue to have to be made on how best to assist peoples who are oppressed by tyrants. Perhaps most pressing of all is this question: What lessons did we learn from Iraq that could be applied to Syria? At the end of the day, that is not a decision for this place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I must ask you to draw to a close.

Elaine Murray: If the decision to hold the debate was about trying to denigrate the United Kingdom or argue for independence, it is the SNP that is diminished and not the people who supported or did not support the invasion of Iraq.

16:08

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): Presiding Officer,

"Mine is the first generation able to contemplate the possibility that we may live our entire lives without going to war or sending our children to war."

Those are the words of one Tony Blair, addressing a North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit. How hollow and ironic those words sound to this day, when many families are missing children from their lives as a result of Tony Blair's decision to drive forward with the war in Iraq.

I hear arguments deployed in the chamber today that the ends have essentially justified the means and that it is okay that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq because the Saddam Hussein regime was eventually overthrown. The idea that retrospective mission creep justifies a falsified prospectus and a blatant disregard for international law beggars belief. It will be cold comfort to those families whose loved ones are no longer with them, and to those communities that are missing individuals as a result of the war. People were sent to war on a false premise and that is seen to be okay—a reason has been invented for them to be there, and the intervention in the first place has been justified.

That will give the families no comfort and it should give politicians no comfort either, however sincerely they might believe that the fact that Saddam Hussein was eventually overthrown means that we can sweep aside the lies and the untruths that were laid before Parliament and the country in order to justify the invasion, and that we can justify the huge loss of life on the basis of a retrospective explanation of the reasons for going to war. I do not think that that would do anybody any credit.

Johann Lamont: Is the member seriously suggesting that somebody like Ann Clwyd had a retrospective explanation for why she supported the war? If he looks at anything that was said by

her and others who raised issues in support of the Kurds, he will see that their decision whether to support the war was a very serious and difficult one. He might disagree with it, but it does not do him any service to say that the explanation was retrospective and somehow made up to match a desire to go to war.

Mark McDonald: But it was entirely retrospective. At no point in advance of the invasion of Iraq was the overthrow of the Hussein regime used by those who were propagating the notion of war as a premise for invasion. Indeed, Tony Blair made a statement to Parliament in which he said:

"I hate his regime—I hope most people do—but even now he could save it by complying with the UN's demand."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 25 February 2003; Vol 400, c 124.]

Up until the date of the invasion, Tony Blair himself was stating quite clearly that if Saddam Hussein complied with the demand to remove weapons—which we now know did not exist—that would somehow enable him to keep his despotic regime in power.

I have no particular love for the regime that Saddam Hussein presided over. It would be folly for people to try to suggest that opposition to the war was by some definition an endorsement of the regime of Saddam Hussein. Those who put forward that argument do themselves no credit.

I say to Mr Lamont that I agree that Iraq should not have had to bear the difficulties of the Hussein regime. It is also fair for politicians whose parties played a role in not just Saddam Hussein's coming into power but his retention of power over the years to acknowledge it. The international community across the globe bears the burden of the flawed enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend approach to international politics and foreign policy, which dominated the cold war agenda. Different sides in the cold war propped up despotic, despicable regimes in order to further their own foreign policy ends. Those who justify international intervention in a nation to enable regime change should remember that the reason why Chile ended up with Pinochet was international interference to instigate regime change. To say that somehow it is acceptable to intervene in another nation in order to instigate regime change flies in the face of not just international law but international precedent.

On the juxtaposition of the constitution, I say to the Labour Party that I can stand here and quite rightly say that I believe that an independent Scotland would be better placed to take its own foreign policy and defence decisions. The Labour Party cannot say that that is outrageous when at the same time Labour politicians such as Dr John Reid will happily make blasé statements that an

independent Scotland would provide a safe haven for terrorists. It cannot come here and claim moral outrage at our talking about the foreign policy agenda that an independent Scotland might pursue.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: No. I am into my final minute.

Kevin Stewart mentioned Allan Douglas from Northfield in Aberdeen. I too have stood at the Cowdray hall memorial in Aberdeen at remembrance Sunday events. I am the grandchild of a war veteran. My grandfather fought in world war 2—he served with the Gordon Highlanders in Burma—so I know the cost that war can bring to individuals and communities. Too many communities bear the scars of the Iraq conflict. There are too many children without mothers or fathers, too many parents without daughters or sons and too many families, towns, villages and cities ripped asunder by the impact of war.

I will finish with another quotation from Tony Blair. He said:

"sometimes it is better to lose and do the right thing than to win and do the wrong thing."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 9 November 2005; Vol 439; col 302.]

If only he had applied that to the Iraq war, rather than the issue to which he was applying it—he thought that the right thing to do was detain people without trial for 90 days. Had he applied it to the Iraq war, we might not have had such devastating loss of life.

16:15

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): I pay tribute to those in the armed forces who have served the United Kingdom not just in Iraq but in all sorts of wars. There is no doubt that those of us who have not endured armed conflict—that applies to many members—can only imagine how difficult and terrifying it must be. Our support and admiration go out to the armed forces, whatever conflicts they are operating in.

It is important that, post-conflict, those in the armed forces are given appropriate support. In recent years, more focus has been placed on post-traumatic stress among war veterans, as they try to overcome the trauma of war. We need more support to deal with that. I support what Drew Smith said about what the Parliament is doing to look at how we help veterans to come to terms with the situation and build a more stable life as they leave the armed forces.

As others have said, the situation in Iraq remains imperfect today. However, we should record our support for the businesses and charities that are working to build a better society

there and to move the community there forward to a more stable basis.

The debate will not go down as one of the most memorable debates in the Scottish Parliament. At times, I have felt as if I have walked into one of those BBC Parliament programmes that rerun debates from years gone by. Some of today's speeches could easily have been made 10 years ago. Some speeches have been somewhat simplistic. There is no doubt that examining the issue of war has been difficult for parliamentarians through the ages. The subject is emotive. The First Minister supported the first Iraq war, and I am sure that he did not take that decision lightly.

I will describe one unfortunate thing about some speeches from SNP back benchers. It is clear that many have grappled with the Iraq war situation. It was difficult for them to decide whether to support the war, and some people have changed their minds since the original vote. However, some SNP members have sought to stereotype everyone who supported the decision as warmongers.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

James Kelly: No—I will not.

That approach is not helpful to the debate.

We should be absolutely clear that the political agenda for the debate is all about the media agenda for this week, which is building towards the announcement on Thursday of the referendum date.

Mark McDonald *rose—*

James Kelly: I will not give way.

As a Parliament, our priorities should be driven not by the SNP media agenda but by the people of Scotland.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

James Kelly: No, thank you.

As I examine the motion and the amendments, I think about what my constituents would make of them. [*Interruption.*] It is not a laughing matter, First Minister. How can I tell the families of my constituents—in an area where 3,367 children are in child poverty—that we are spending our time in the Scottish Parliament rerunning a debate from 10 years ago?

What about young unemployed people? Their number has doubled in the past five years. What do I say to those constituents? Do I say that we cannot examine their concerns today because we are at the Scottish Parliament debating club?

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald *rose—*

James Kelly: No, I will not give way.

Why do we not use our time to examine the fact that more than 5,000 racial assaults still happen in Scotland every year? Rather than rerun a debate from 10 years ago, we should look at the issues of health inequalities and examine why there are 120,000 fewer college places. That would be a much better use of parliamentary time and would be looking at issues that are in the powers of the Parliament.

Kevin Stewart: Will James Kelly give way?

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

James Kelly: SNP members, rather than turn their bile on those who supported the Iraq war, should perhaps examine how we can arrest the effects of the bedroom tax and help local authorities to do that.

The public will not be impressed with the way in which we have conducted ourselves today. The SNP has turned the Parliament into nothing more than a fringe meeting at the SNP conference. If we want to be a real Parliament, we need to step up to the plate and debate the issues that affect the communities of Scotland today.

16:21

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I will be mindful of our standing orders and confine my speech to the content of the motion. In 2003, along with 100,000 people in Glasgow, a million people in London and tens of millions of people in 60 countries across the planet, I marched and shouted, "Not in my name," to an illegal war predicated on lies. No matter what Labour Party members want to say today, no revision of history can say that the war was a humanitarian one, because it was an illegal war predicated on lies.

Why did I march in February 2003 and why was I kettled in Sauchiehall Street in March 2003? Unlike Kevin Stewart and Elaine Murray, I am a pacifist. I know that violence is never the answer. In this Parliament, we have zero tolerance to domestic violence, sexual violence and bullying. Very few members would not agree with that statement of zero tolerance. Therefore, I say that war is never the solution. War dehumanises people. We have heard the statistics on the loss of life on and around the battlefield in Iraq in the past 10 years. More than 5,000 servicemen and women and perhaps 120,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed. War dehumanises and leads to torture. We have heard of the horrors in Abu Ghraib and we are hearing of other horrors through the Al-Sweady inquiry.

What does war do to women and children? It is not just bombs and bullets that affect women and children during a war, as they have the unique and hideous extras to contend with of rape, sex trafficking and prostitution. That is what has happened in the 10 years since the beginning of the war in Iraq. Another effect on women is that, in war situations, primary healthcare is replaced by casualty and trauma units, which leads to a rise in infant mortality. In war zones, infant mortality doubles and there is a rise in epidemics. We forget to immunise people, because we do not have time for public health. In war zones, tuberculosis quadruples.

Professor Patricia Hynes, formerly of Boston University, has said:

“a full accounting of the harm of war to civilian women is needed in the debate over whether war is justified.”

We have heard the statistics. The average figure for the number of Iraqi civilians killed as a result of the war is perhaps 150,000. However, the World Health Organization reckons that, in the past 10 years, 690,000 Iraqis have died because, as a result of the war, there has been no healthcare that is aimed at the civilian population.

John Lamont: Will the member give way?

Fiona McLeod: No, I do not think that it is appropriate to give way so that the Tory party can revise its stance and morality in this debate.

Last weekend, the *Sunday Herald* had a two-page spread headlined, “The courage of ‘cowards’”. The article was about the call for recognition, with medals, of world war one conscientious objectors. I say very clearly that pacifists are not cowards. Pacifists are defenders of human rights and that is what today’s debate in the Parliament is talking about. Ten years on from an illegal war in Iraq, we are still defending the human rights of people in Iraq.

That statement would be supported by the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq, which says that, 10 years on from the end of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship, the life of a woman is worse than it was. I close my contribution to the debate by saying, again, that the war was not in my name. I also say, proudly, that the debate has a constitutional angle. After 2014, we can be sure, confident and certain that an illegal war will never happen in Scotland’s name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Margo MacDonald. You have up to two minutes.

16:26

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I am grateful for small mercies, Presiding Officer.

Notwithstanding Drew Smith’s remarks, and without wishing to patronise in any way, I have to say that good friends of mine, some of whom are no longer in Parliament, regret that their loyalty to their party took over from their loyalty to a much greater ideal. It would be easier on them and the rest of us if they just admitted it now, because we owe that to the Iraqi people.

We must make sure that such a war does not happen again. Although I do not have the unalloyed hope of the previous speaker, I hope that what she said might be more true and that we would start off from the higher premise of understanding international law and what is meant when we say that regime change should not be an excuse for war. The Labour Government of the day did not understand those things and the Bush Administration ignored them. That is why I relodged my motion, which asks that Tony Blair be arraigned as an international war criminal. I believe that he, and George Bush, fought an illegal war and many of those members on the other side of the chamber agree with me. This time, I ask them to take advantage of the cover offered by the amendments but not to fool themselves.

The final remarks of Johann Lamont’s speech were the most telling. How do bigger and stronger nations help weaker, poorer nations? At what point does it become intrusive? It is worth talking about that because there is a third way, and the United Nations probably has to be at the pointy end of implementing it. We have to talk about it and do so honestly among ourselves. In that way, Johann Lamont added something to the debate but many of her other remarks, which impugned the motivation of Willie Rennie, myself and, had he spoken in the debate, Patrick Harvie in supporting the idea of revisiting the issue 10 years on, did her no good. I see that she is shaking her head in disagreement and I look forward to seeing it noted that I officially disagreed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches, and I call Willie Rennie to close for the Liberal party. You have six minutes.

16:28

Willie Rennie: Back to the Liberal party days—that would be wonderful.

I woke up this morning to hear a radio report from a BBC reporter who had been in Iraq in the days immediately after the invasion. He was speaking to a man who had been sentenced by Saddam Hussein’s regime to a punishment for mistakenly writing on Saddam Hussein’s head on a currency note. The punishment was to be death by acid bath. That was Saddam Hussein. That was the brutal dictator who we were dealing with at the time. I therefore have a huge amount of

sympathy for those who found it to be a difficult decision to make when they supported the Iraq war.

I fully accept that Ann Clwyd, with her stories—and I have listened to Ann Clwyd on this in the House of Commons—makes a compelling case about the minorities who were punished in Iraq. I have heard the stories that John Lamont mentioned about the thousands of Kurds and Shias who were put to death under Saddam Hussein's regime. I have heard the stories about the marsh Arabs, who suffered after they were left high and dry after the first Gulf war. They thought that they were going to get the full support of the allies against Saddam Hussein at that time, only to be left in the lurch. I understand all those stories, but the four tests that I mentioned earlier—that were absolutely required to be met in order to go ahead with the war—were not followed.

Tony Blair made a compelling case; the simplistic argument—"If you knew what I knew"—is very compelling. He tried to tempt us into believing that he knew much more than he was able to tell us. It was quite an attractive argument and I can understand how so many were seduced by it. I do not condemn those who took the decision to support the war. I disagreed with them fundamentally. I was opposed to the war, my party was opposed to the war and I am glad that we were opposed to the war, because we did not believe that there was justification for the war.

Kevin Stewart made an excellent speech, with his remarks about Allan Douglas and the turmoil that Allan Douglas's family has gone through since. I have had to sit in the House of Commons when Gordon Brown—and Tony Blair before him—read out the weekly roll-call of the dead. It was a sobering experience. It brought it home that we had made a decision in the House of Commons to go to war and as a result, this roll-call was now being read out and 179 men and women died in Iraq. Allan Douglas was one of them—one of the brave. We need to remind ourselves of those personal stories. Joan McAlpine's story about a victim on the other side, Ali Abbas, was equally compelling. He was one of hundreds of thousands who suffered as a result of what happened in Iraq.

Those stories are important. We should not just think of such things in geostrategic and geopolitical terms. It is all about the individual—what does it do to the individual? Drew Smith made a good speech about veterans. Again, this is one of the lessons that we have to learn—about looking after the people who fought for the nation on our behalf. The problems around alcohol, prison and homelessness are well recognised. The Scottish Government and the UK Government have made good progress. The priority treatment

for veterans is excellent. Headley Court down in the south-east of England is a fantastic facility. If members ever get a chance to go and see it, please go and see it. Veterans first point, at the other end of Princes Street, provides an excellent service, in particular for people who are suffering from mental health problems and also from combat stress, down in Ayr and elsewhere in the UK. It provides excellent facilities to deal with the problems that Drew Smith rightly highlighted. That is one of the lessons from Iraq—that we improve the support for those who have fought on our behalf.

Iraq has been unstable since the start of the war. The shift in the balance of power between Iraq and Iran has been quite significant. Iran is quite a manipulative nation; it gets its tentacles all over that part of the world. When I was in Basra, I saw the effect of Iran's influence in the south of Iraq. It was funding some of the terrorist groups in the south. It managed to kidnap some of our sailors in the Gulf. We should be wary whenever we intervene within a region; we have to be conscious of the balance of power between all the different stakeholders and countries, because if we unsettle that balance, there are unintended consequences.

I disagree with Fiona McLeod.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

I recognise that Fiona McLeod is a pacifist. We have to weigh up the people who may suffer if we fail to act. That is the balance. The four tests are critical: making sure that we alleviate suffering; making sure that we have regional and local support; the United Nations has to be on board; and it has to be legal. Those are the four tests. If we comply with those four tests, we should not leave a nation and the people who are suffering within it high and dry.

The final point that we need to remember is about those who spoke up. At the time, the momentum was in favour of war. I remember the pressure that we felt that we were under from all the compelling arguments that were being made. I am delighted that many MSPs, including Bruce Crawford, Jenny Marra and Fiona McLeod, attended the march, but I also give full praise to those who spoke up in the House of Commons—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Willie Rennie: Robin Cook, Ming Campbell, Charles Kennedy and Alex Salmond all deserve credit, because they stood up when it counted.

16:35

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It has been a difficult debate for many members, and it has been difficult for members of different parties for different reasons. Nevertheless, it has been a debate that we have addressed with a degree of decorum that is commensurate with the issues that we are considering.

As I review the debate, I will say some things that will be controversial. The first issue that I need to address is the concern about why we are holding the debate at all. Although I accept that it is appropriate for us to remember the 10th anniversary of the second Gulf war and those who were involved in it, there is concern, as a number of members have expressed, about whether the debate is simply part of a ploy to build up to announcements later in the week. I think that Jenny Marra, in particular, was treated very badly when she raised that issue, and the numerous bogus points of order during her speech—which, in my view, were designed to prevent her from making that point—undermined some of the integrity that the debate had had up to that point.

I turn to other issues. The elephant in the room is, of course, Tony Blair and the action that he took while he was Prime Minister of this country. I will not dwell too long on the issue, because I know that it causes particular difficulty for Labour members. It appears that Tony Blair set out to deceive, albeit that he was, perhaps, guilty of deceiving himself. For that reason, we must be extremely careful about how we address the matter. People had various motivations, but those who suggest that there was somehow a criminal intent in pursuing the war need to come up with evidence to support that accusation.

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, I am not taking an intervention.

I wish that those who repeatedly used the term “illegal war”—who include the member who just tried to intervene—had gone to greater lengths to attempt to define it.

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, thank you.

In opening the debate, the First Minister took the opportunity to exercise his extreme talent for 20:20 hindsight. If we were to listen to the line that he often repeats—“I told you so”—any criticism would fall away, but we need only look back to March 1999 to realise that Alex Salmond’s judgment in these matters is not always perfect. The SNP spectacularly failed to get it right on the international stage over the NATO intervention in

Kosovo, when a bid to stop ethnic cleansing there came under significant criticism from Alex Salmond as a member of the House of Commons. In fact, he described that intervention as “unpardonable folly”. He was shown by events to be simply wrong.

It is obviously the case that the First Minister often cannot stop himself scoring cheap points at the expense of others. That approach degraded the debate. Furthermore, if we look back at the situation that arose in the lead-up to and during the Gulf wars, we realise that many decisions were made against a background that has not formed part of today’s discussion. Indeed, the support that was given to Iraq prior to the first Gulf war was very much against the background of that country having to defend itself desperately from a frantic invasion by its neighbour, Iran.

It is very difficult for us to take any decisions that are based on a single moment in time without taking into account the context. In fact, that context must be taken into account when we consider the issue of weapons of mass destruction. We now know that they did not exist in Iraq, but we also know that they had previously existed in that country. In addition, we know that, had the Iraqi Government chosen to co-operate with Hans Blix and his weapons inspectors, it could have proved its point. Unfortunately, it was not willing to make that change.

As I progress towards the end of my remarks, I believe that it would be inappropriate for me not to take the opportunity again to pay tribute on this 10th anniversary to the 179 members of the British armed forces and Ministry of Defence civilians who paid for the Iraq conflict with their lives.

This anniversary also provides us with a chance to look ahead to Iraq’s future. Significant challenges remain and terrorist attacks continue to kill innocent people today, among others. However, UK troops based in Iraq trained more than 22,000 policemen and 20,000 Iraqi soldiers between 2004 and 2009, which was done first as part of building up the 10th Iraqi army division in south-eastern Iraq and, after 2007, to train the 14th division in Basra. The UK troops have also worked closely with the Iraqi civilian authorities to develop Basra international airport, which now handles some 4,000 passengers a month.

I like to look to the future. I think that, having had this debate, we need to take the opportunity to look at our record in Iraq and treat it positively. We need to look to the future and ensure that we use our judgment wisely and any intervention carefully, but we should always consider that option.

16:42

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): This afternoon the Scottish Government asked us to talk about Iraq 10 years on, but then it and its party colleagues largely failed to do that—certainly not in terms of what we might do now to make things better.

The members from other parties who have moved amendments have done so seriously and constructively, which I welcome. However, a number of SNP members, starting with the First Minister, have used this occasion largely to rehearse the arguments for and against a decision by the British Government and a vote in the House of Commons 10 years ago for which neither the Scottish Government nor the Scottish Parliament was responsible. As James Kelly said, 10 years on from the invasion of Iraq, the SNP appears not to have moved on at all.

The centrepiece of the First Minister's speech was his assertion that intervention in Iraq was an illegal military conflict. That is his opinion, but Alex Salmond, of all people, should reflect on his degree of certainty over the UK Government's legal advice on the war in Iraq. So secretive has he been as First Minister on legal advice to his Government on an issue of international law that he went to court to avoid having to reveal the existence or otherwise of that advice, even though such advice did not in fact exist. The time of this Parliament might be better spent on scrutiny of that bizarre tale, because this Parliament's job is to scrutinise the Scottish Government's actions and to hold Mr Salmond and his ministers to account, rather than to listen to Mr Salmond's opinion about the legal advice offered to others.

The First Minister: I cannot believe that the member is seriously equating an argument about Europe or any other matter with the seriousness of taking a country to war, with the implications and the repercussions that that has for hundreds of thousands of lives lost. The reason for us debating it now on the 10th anniversary is to try to chart a path to ensure that it does not happen again in our name or any other. Can the member, in all this anxiety by the Labour Party not to talk about the war, just accept the seriousness of the subject that we are debating?

Lewis Macdonald: Of course the issue of war and peace is a very serious issue, but so is the issue of Scotland's future. If it is right to say that legal advice on war and peace should be made known and if it is right for the First Minister to judge the legal advice given to a different Government, surely he can at least be open and honest about the advice given to him about the future of Scotland.

If we are to consider the lessons of Iraq, surely we should not do so on the basis of divisions and controversies 10 years ago in Westminster. We on this side have not lodged an amendment, and what we have heard today confirms that that was the right approach.

In an intervention, Christina McKelvie highlighted exactly the dilemma faced by any responsible Government in the real world in which we live: if we free people from tyranny in the middle east or anywhere else, we cannot guarantee that they will use that freedom to make choices with which we agree. We have seen that in Iraq, under its democratically elected coalition Government; we have seen it Libya since NATO intervened to bring down Gaddafi; and we can see the tensions of free political choices in Egypt, too.

Christine Grahame: Did Lewis Macdonald hear the quotes that I gave from Lord Dannatt and Sir Michael Jackson that there was no forward planning about what to do once they had toppled that statue? That was the problem: they dismantled the structures and allowed rioting to take place and the crooks to move in.

Lewis Macdonald: If Christine Grahame is asking me to agree that the planning of the occupation of Iraq was inadequate and had very negative effects, it would be impossible to disagree. However, the problem with Christine Grahame and her colleagues is that, having identified the dilemma that we face in seeking to create a free society where an unfree society has existed, they failed to identify what to do about it.

Bruce Crawford, for example, denounced the Saddam regime, he denounced what he called the "murderous sanctions" that were imposed as an alternative to war, and then he denounced the military intervention to bring down the regime. He did not say anything about how the international community should have engaged with Iraq in Saddam's era. Even more importantly, he said nothing about how we should engage with Iraq now.

Alex Salmond claimed that an independent Scotland would never make a bad decision on foreign policy. His only defence of that bizarre proposition was that war in Iraq was based on a Prime Minister misleading Parliament—as if such a thing could never happen here.

The reality is that the decisions on the Iraq war were intensely difficult decisions on how to deal with a highly dangerous and ruthless dictator who did not hesitate to use illegal weapons in waging an illegal war against Iran—which cost more Muslim lives than any other conflict in modern history—and who did not hesitate to use those illegal weapons in conducting genocidal attacks against his fellow Iraqis.

Margo MacDonald *rose—*

Lewis Macdonald: Those were hugely—

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way.

Lewis Macdonald: Those were hugely difficult decisions. They divided opinion in the Labour Party and they divided opinion in the country, but it appears that no such divisions troubled the SNP. That might seem quite surprising; there is an SNP member's motion before the Parliament now to commemorate 180,000 Kurdish victims of genocide in Saddam's Iraq in the run-up to the first Gulf war. In a party that seems to be concerned about the repression of Iraqi Kurds under Saddam and his predecessors, it is surprising that not a single member backed the invasion of Iraq that brought that repression to an end.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Lewis Macdonald: It is also hard to understand why in all the speeches that we have heard today we have not heard a single speech from the SNP benches that welcomed the fact that that repression has come to an end in the past 10 years.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Lewis Macdonald: Of course. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order!

Neil Findlay: It is good to get someone to give way, as none of the SNP members would give way when I attempted to intervene.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Make your intervention, please.

Neil Findlay: Mr Macdonald is quite right to highlight that there were divisions in our party. I take no pleasure in saying that I opposed the war and every day I believe that I am proved more right now than I was then. In our party, two of the greatest, most articulate and most active opponents were Tam Dalyell and George Galloway, both of whom would be appalled that the blood of Iraqi children and UK troops is being used in a constitutional debate.

Lewis Macdonald: Indeed. It is surprising, given their apparent interest in the fate of Kurds in Iraq, how little SNP members appear to know about the real progress that there has been in Iraqi Kurdistan in the past 10 years. Why are they not interested in the fact that literacy has increased significantly, infant mortality has fallen, there are seven universities where there used to be just one—

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

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

Lewis Macdonald: —and there is a regional devolved Government in Iraqi Kurdistan, where there used to be the tyranny of Saddam in Baghdad? [*Interruption.*]

I heard a heckling intervention from the SNP front bench just now. The member said, "What has this got to do with the war?" Surely now the issue is not the war that happened 10 years ago but the reconstruction of Iraq and the fate of the people who live there. That is what our Parliament should focus on if we want to talk at all about Iraq 10 years on.

16:50

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): This is a very important debate for two primary reasons, both of which are alluded to in the First Minister's motion, which I second. I also give notice that the Scottish Government will accept Willie Rennie's amendment.

The first reason is, as many members have said, to remember those who died or were injured, traumatised or dispossessed. Like many members, I know a number of people who were involved in the Iraq war; indeed, yesterday, I was visited at my surgery by someone who received a traumatic brain injury—a TBI—and who struggles daily to ensure that the war does not define the rest of his life.

Drew Smith raised the issue of veteran support. The Government has introduced concessionary travel for veterans. It is the first Government to do that. I think that, if Drew Smith asked Poppyscotland about the comparative records of the Scottish Government and the UK Government, he would find that it would be very complimentary about what the Scottish Government has done.

To go back to Willie Rennie's point, the Scottish Government has given substantial moneys—for example, £640,000 to Veterans First Point, £1.2 million for specialist care to Combat Stress, and a further £0.5 million for outreach care. We have a lot to be proud of in what we have done for veterans in the Government.

To underline my first point, we should remember all of those who died in the war.

Drew Smith: I absolutely welcome the remarks that the minister has repeated today. The issue of concessionary travel is specifically to do with the subway in Glasgow. It would be good if the minister could engage with Strathclyde partnership for transport on how we could take that issue forward. It has been taken forward in partnership with the parties in Glasgow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brown, we will move to the debate, please.

Keith Brown: Let me say only that I have discussed that matter with SPT.

We should remember all the service personnel from the UK, the US and Iraq who died, all the civilians who died, and those who were injured and the families of those who were injured, as they number in their hundreds of thousands.

As I said, there are two reasons to discuss the invasion of Iraq. First, we should remember those people, and secondly we should learn the lessons. We should learn the lesson that we have to be absolutely clear and honest about the basis for war when we ask people to accept the case for war.

It has been said already that going to war is the gravest decision that a Government can take. If anybody doubts that, they should listen to the words of King Croesus, who said:

"No one would be foolish enough to choose war over peace—in peace sons bury their fathers, but in war fathers bury their sons."

They should listen to the words of Dwight Eisenhower, who said:

"I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity."

What, then, was the case for war? What was Tony Blair's basis for it? There were three essential elements: weapons of mass destruction, the 45-minute threat, and, of course, the associated threat of al-Qa'ida working with Saddam Hussein. We know that weapons of mass destruction were not there—that was a false prospectus—and that the 45-minute threat was absurd. If that applied to anything, it applied to Saddam's plans to launch a strike on his own troops if they chose to desert; it did not apply to a threat to the national interests of this country.

We also know that the al-Qa'ida threat that was raised was false. Al-Qa'ida and Saddam Hussein were the bitterest of enemies and were not working in collusion. Therefore, the basis for war against Iraq was "a lie"—those are not my words; they are the words of Joschka Fischer on the "Panorama" programme last night. He was the German foreign secretary who knew something of how thin the intelligence that was provided to the UK and US Governments was.

The second lesson has to be that the basis for going to war cannot be changed after having gone to war. We have seen some of that today. Tony Blair was very clear in the House of Commons when he said that he had never said that it was about regime change. It is not permitted under the UN charter to invade another country to effect regime change. He said that it was for weapons of

mass destruction. We know that, if we change the basis on which we go to war after the event, we will lose the credibility and moral authority in having gone into it in the first place. That is a crucial lesson for those who supported the decision.

It might interest members to know that a senior Labour member of this Parliament said in a previous debate:

"I do not particularly care that we did not find weapons of mass destruction."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 2004; c 8751-52.]

What does he think that means to the people who were told that they were going to war to find weapons of mass destruction? He does not even care about the fact that that was essentially a lie.

The entire speech of John Lamont was based on the idea of regime change. That was not the view of the Conservatives in the House of Commons when they voted to support Tony Blair. It is interesting to ask: exactly what is the Tory position?

Referring to the stance of the Labour Party in particular, some of the members who have spoken today have talked about everything apart from the Iraq war. That tells me that the Labour Party is not willing to learn the lessons—particularly that we have to be honest with people before making the gravest decision of all. [*Interruption.*] Well, it is clearly the case that the Labour Party was not honest with people. Even those hundreds of thousands of people who were against the war would have liked weapons of mass destruction to have been found and to find that the Government had not been lying to them, but that was not the case—the Government had been lying to them, and so they lost faith in the integrity of government.

Margo MacDonald: Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: If I can make a bit more progress just now, I will see whether I have time left at the end.

There is also an absence of any contrition from the Labour Party today, which I believe is a certain sign that Labour is not fit to be in a position to take such life-and-death decisions.

I return to the point about consistency. I understand from what Johann Lamont said that she would have opposed the second Gulf war if she had voted in London, but she supported it here. She did not support the first Gulf war, even though it was backed by a United Nations mandate and was the result of a country invading another country. She did not support the idea that the decision that was made was about weapons of mass destruction. It is hard to see the logic, or

indeed any principle, in those positions. They cannot be reconciled with each other.

Johann Lamont: I suggest that the minister look at what I said. I explained that what happened in the first Gulf war informed my view of what we should be doing in the second Gulf war. We abandoned people—indeed, there will have been people in the chamber who condemned George Bush for not continuing and who said at a later stage that he should have done so.

It does no service to anyone to imagine that the decision was a simple one on either side. I ask the minister to reflect that what I told him in the chamber was genuinely my position and that we find out things now that we did not know then. That is the truth.

Keith Brown: The record will show exactly what integrity and consistency there was in the justifications that Johann Lamont has given.

If the reasons that are given for war are falsehoods and if, as was conceded by Richard Dearlove of the UK security services,

“the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy”—

not the other way round—there can be no chance of there having been a legal basis for the war.

As Willie Rennie pointed out, the other way of having a legal basis for the war was through the UN, but the UN was scorned and ignored at the time. Vitriol was poured on the French, the Chinese and others. Ultimately, the UN was bypassed.

In the UK, the false facts comprised a false prospectus for war, and many people who supported it have recognised that and have expressed regret for having supported Tony Blair. Alistair Darling, Jack McConnell, Ed Miliband and Jack Straw have all expressed regrets, none of which we have heard from those in the Labour Party who supported him and who are here today.

The issue of independence has been mentioned. I had not intended to mention it, but Johann Lamont mentioned it a number of times. Interestingly, Johann Lamont mentioned it 10 years ago when we debated the situation in the Parliament. She said:

“I wonder how much more irrelevant it can be to have a party that is based entirely on the desire to seek further division within our country.”—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2003; c 16447.]

That debate was about Iraq. She was the one who introduced the issue last time. It is interesting to ponder whether the politicians in the Parliament today would support the same position.

It is also interesting to ponder the actions of the Conservative Party. Last week, it was reminiscent

of the 1980s, with a UK Government minister coming up to Scotland on a flight, delivering a statement to tell us that we were unfit to look after our own defence, and getting on a flight back down south again.

“Join the Navy and see the Clyde”—

I think that was the quote from Philip Hammond.

Lewis Macdonald rose—

Keith Brown: I can think of many mothers and fathers who would like their kids to have seen the Clyde rather than the Euphrates and the—

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The member is in his last minute.

Keith Brown: That goes to the heart of what the armed forces in any country are for. They are not to be used as an extension of foreign policy, certainly not in the interests of another country. They should be used to defend the vital interests of the country that they serve.

It is interesting to ponder what approach we would take if we were independent and if this Parliament had the responsibility. I would go for the views of somebody other than Tony Blair:

“Nae mair will our bonnie callants merch tae war whan our braggarts crouselly craw”—

I repeat—whan our braggarts crouselly craw—

“nor wee weans frae pitheid an clachan murn the ships sailin doun the Broomielaw”.

That is a far better way to look at defence. It may be idealistic, in the same way that Fiona McLeod mentioned the fact that she is a pacifist, but that approach—the essential nature of what we are asking people to do; the price that we are asking them to pay—should be weighed in the balance in a way that it patently was not when the issue was discussed at Westminster all those years ago.

Those sentiments provide an excellent route map for the Parliament to decide on these matters in the future—much more so than what was discussed, as I say, 10 years ago. For those reasons, I am proud to support the motion in the name of the First Minister.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on 10 years on from the invasion in Iraq, if the amendment in the name of John Lamont is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Willie Rennie falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-05981.2, in the name of John Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05981, in the name of Alex Salmond, on 10 years on from the invasion in Iraq, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (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)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (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) (Ind)
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)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (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)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
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)
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
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) (Ind)
Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothian) (Ind)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)

Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 10, Against 72, Abstentions 34.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S4M-05981.1, in the name of Willie Rennie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05981, in the name of Alex Salmond, on 10 years on from the invasion in Iraq, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (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)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (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) (Ind)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothian) (Ind)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)

Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 73, Against 10, Abstentions 33.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-05981, in the name of Alex Salmond, as amended, on 10 years on from the invasion in Iraq, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (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)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (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) (Ind)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothian) (Ind)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

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 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
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 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
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 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 73, Against 10, Abstentions 33.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges the civilian, military and economic cost of the Iraq war and its aftermath; pays tribute to the armed forces and remembers the almost 5,000 allied servicemen and women and estimated 120,000 Iraqi civilians who lost their lives; notes that, 10 years on from the invasion, questions remain unanswered about the UK Government's decision to invade without a UN resolution; regrets the decision of the Labour government, with the support of the Conservatives, to press ahead with the invasion despite considerable opposition and many warnings about the danger of armed conflict; is of the view that the intervention was illegal under international law, and believes that one of the key lessons of the Iraq war is the need for all nations, large and small, to conduct international affairs as cooperatively as possible according to international law and the authority of the United Nations and to act as good global citizens rather than engaging in reckless, illegal military conflicts with incalculable human and material costs.

Count Us In (Autism)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-05568, in the name of Mark McDonald, on count us in. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the report, *Count us in: it pays to listen*, by the National Autistic Society Scotland as part of its Count us in campaign to give people with autism more of a say in decisions that directly affect them; understands that there are approximately 50,000 people with autism in Scotland, with an estimated 6,000 of these living in the north east of Scotland, and autism directly affects around 200,000 people every day; further understands that only 15% of adults with autism are in full-time employment and 39% of those interviewed for the Count us in report said that they had lost a job as a result of their autism; welcomes the Scottish Government's investment of £13.4 million over four years to implement the first autism strategy to improve support services for adults and children with autism and their families; further welcomes the input of the Count us in campaign, and looks forward to working with a range of organisations to continue to maximise the opportunities created by the strategy and by involving people with autism more closely in the decision-making process.

17:05

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

At this morning's Health and Sport Committee meeting we had a discussion about the national autism strategy. It is timely that, following that discussion, we have this debate in the Parliament. I thank the members who supported my motion and who have remained in the chamber to listen to or contribute to the debate.

The report, "Count us in: it pays to listen", was launched by the National Autistic Society in the Parliament. The actor Richard Wilson, who is the patron of the National Autistic Society in Scotland, attended the launch, as did the minister and a number of members—including you, Presiding Officer; I know that you have previously chaired the cross-party group on autism. I think that all members agree that the reception was excellent and highlighted a number of issues that are raised in the report.

In the report, four key priorities are identified that should be pursued at national and local levels. The first is sustained employment, and the Scottish Government is asked to

"appoint an Autism Employment Ambassador to champion opportunities for people with autism in the workplace."

The report's authors go on to say:

"Local councils should map the need for employment support in their areas and include employment support for people with autism in their local plans."

The second priority is choice and control. The report's authors say:

"With effective transition planning and support after diagnosis, people with autism should be empowered to advocate for themselves. The availability of, and need for, independent advocacy services should be mapped across all services that people with autism need to access."

The third priority is challenging discrimination, and the report says:

"The negative attitudes many people with autism experience are debilitating and must be challenged with a concerted campaign to raise public awareness and understanding of autism."

Finally, on professional knowledge and access to support, the report says:

"Sensitively handled, the experience of getting a diagnosis and support to understand its implications can make a huge difference to personal happiness."

The Scottish Government is asked to consider a national health service health improvement, efficiency and governance, access and treatment target, to deliver post-diagnostic support. The report goes on to say:

"Local authorities should invest in specific services that help address social exclusion and the challenges of self-advocacy among people with autism from across the spectrum".

On employment, 43 per cent of graduates or postgraduates with autism never achieve any sort of managerial position. Thirty-one per cent of people with a higher national certificate, higher national diploma, degree or postgraduate qualification are unemployed. Half the people with autism who were surveyed for the report have experienced career regression and are consistently failing to achieve the average earnings of their peers. Some 24 per cent have not had paid employment since they were 18, and 66 per cent rely to some extent on their families for financial support.

Of the people who were surveyed, 53 per cent wanted support with employment, 39 per cent had lost a job due to their autism, 36 per cent said that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment at work and 55 per cent wanted help with developing social skills.

From my discussions with individuals, at the reception and in the community, I have been interested to learn that people with autism do not need massive changes to be made to the workplace environment to enable them to sustain employment. Employers should take an active interest in considering whether they could do something in that regard. At Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body question time, I asked about accreditation for visitors to the Parliament, and I have spoken to local representatives of NAS about whether it would be

worth having some form of accreditation or kite mark that employers could achieve, to demonstrate that they provide an autism-friendly workplace, not just on the customer-facing side of the business but for their employees.

At the reception, we heard from Michael Clarkson, a gentleman with Asperger's syndrome. He spoke of his experiences and his difficulties in finding a suitable job. It was interesting to hear him talk about his hobby and passion, which is cricket scoring, and his achievement of becoming a member of the International Cricket Council's European scorers panel. His experience exemplifies the talents that people with autism and Asperger's syndrome have, which could be utilised in the workplace if employers took a more sensitive approach.

On choice and control, 91 per cent would like more say over the support that they receive; 66 per cent have not made use of an advocacy service; 16 per cent currently have access to advocacy; and 37 per cent would like advocacy support. It is important that what is being asked for here is, first, the ability to self-advocate where possible. Many people with autism and Asperger's syndrome are perfectly capable of self-advocating. Where that is not possible, the ability to access advocacy services absolutely has to be available.

On the issue of challenging discrimination, 79 per cent of those surveyed think that the public's understanding of autism is poor or very poor, and 78 per cent of young people with autism think that people outside their family do not know enough about autism. Sixty-five per cent of young people with autism have been bullied at school; 33 per cent of adults have experienced bullying or harassment at work; and 36 per cent have experienced unfair treatment or discrimination at work. I will return to that issue in my closing remarks.

On professional knowledge and access to support, 33 per cent say that it has taken three years or more to get a diagnosis; 42 per cent say that the process was too stressful; 27 per cent say that they have been misdiagnosed; and 6 per cent have paid to access diagnosis.

Those who have spoken about autism, both on the record and to me, acknowledge that it is a great relief when a diagnosis arrives—not just to the individual but also to their family. They can then access the necessary support services that are available. We must do everything that we can to ensure that that diagnosis is both prompt and appropriate.

I said that I would come back to the issue of discrimination. We entrust many of these targets to the Government. I know that the minister has taken on board the recommendations and fed

them to the national reference group that he has established as part of the autism strategy. However, there is one target that falls not just on the shoulders of Government, but on the shoulders of us all. That is the issue of challenging discrimination. I was privileged to speak at the recent Aberdeenshire conference on autism, where I talked about addressing the societal perceptions that exist and the duties that we all have.

I am a parent of an autistic child. My son is four and was diagnosed with autism when he was three. I have encountered the discrimination and difficulties that can arise because people do not understand autism. People give looks and tuts; they offer advice about how you should be looking after a child who is having an autistic meltdown that is, frankly, completely inappropriate. Other parents have experienced great difficulties, too. I heard about a wee boy who was the only child in his playgroup not to be invited to one of his peers' birthday parties because of the way he behaves as an autistic child. Imagine the hurt and damage that that can cause children and their families.

The challenge for us all, in all walks of life—whether as parliamentarians who have the privilege of being able to express our views to the organs of the press, or as individuals in our communities, talking to people and challenging stigmas and attitudes where they arise—is to ensure that discrimination about autism ends. We want to see a time when we do not need to campaign for understanding and acceptance of autism because people with autism are accepted, understood and recognised as the valuable part of our community that we all know them to be.

17:14

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I very much welcome the report, "Count us in: it pays to listen", by the National Autistic Society. The event in the Parliament was excellent. I learned an awful lot that night about, among other things, the absolute potential that so many people with autism have, which goes beyond anything I could ever aspire to. It was truly enlightening.

I welcome, too, Scotland's first autism strategy and our Government's investment in that. However, while it is great that our strategy is there, there are always further steps to take after first launching a strategy. I know that the minister, Michael Matheson, is always looking to see how the strategy can be improved. There is always more to be done: bits we might have missed or could add to. I do not necessarily mean that that is always the Scottish Government's responsibility, because some things that could be much improved are the responsibility of local government, in its areas of operation, or of the

Westminster Government—issues such as benefits, for example.

I would like to quickly outline a few examples of issues that I have come across through talking to constituents who have autistic children or are looking after autistic adults.

I always find the terminology difficult. Mark McDonald was saying that people just do not understand it. Part of that is because of the huge variation among people who are on what we call the autism spectrum. That variation can be physical, as well as in terms of ability levels. I am not an expert in these things but I am told that the autism of one young chap in my constituency is so severe that it affects him physically as well and gives him very particular special needs.

I find that, very often, at a local authority level, services are not quite matched up. I know one family in which there is quite a severely autistic child who needs a high level of looking after. His mother, Catriona, also has responsibility for looking after her mother, who suffers from dementia. She finds that she can get support to help with her mum and she can get support to help with her wee lad, but she can never get both elements of support at the same time. As a result, she never gets any time on her own because, on the day when she gets respite care for her lad, she is looking after her mum, and vice versa. Meanwhile, her husband is working every hour he can to give his family as good a life as possible. There seems to be no way of bringing the services together so that she gets a break every now and then. If there were someone who could sit down with a family and look at all their needs in the round, that might make things a bit easier.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is important. I recently had an interesting discussion with people with varying needs—some were autistic and others had various physical needs. They were a group of people who have gone to the wonderful Sanderson high school in East Kilbride together. All of a sudden, they are leaving school, they do not have a youth club to go to any more, either, and they have nowhere to go where they can meet as friends and feel comfortable in their routine. There is nothing there to help them. In this case, parents are getting together to provide something, and we are trying to help with that as far as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you could come to a close.

Linda Fabiani: The final thing that I wanted to say was about how funding and benefits cut off at that transition point, too. A young constituent of mine, Anthony, has very severe needs and requires the same level of care from his mum at 18 as he did at eight, and her income has been

cut—for all sorts of reasons that I will not go into—by up to £500 a month. They are going through difficult times and every agency that is able to help ought to be doing an awful lot more.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I should have said this at the beginning of the debate, but members should make speeches of no more than four minutes.

17:18

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Mark McDonald on bringing this important subject to the chamber, giving us the opportunity to recognise the great work that is done by the National Autistic Society Scotland and enhancing our understanding of the issue, of which he clearly has a great deal of experience because of family circumstances.

The most crucial point of the “Count us in: it pays to listen” report is that the experience and advice of those who live with autism should be listened to and used to produce more effective services. Clearly, that applies in general to many other services. I suppose that it is what we used to call co-productionism. I do not know whether that term is still used, but I know that the Scottish Government is supporting that in various ways and I am pleased that it has today said that it will endorse the patient opinion website, which provides another way of listening to the views of those who use services.

The report highlights the fact that the lifetime cost of providing support for people with autism ranges from £3.1 million to £4.6 million. Working closely with service users not only allows individual service users a greater degree of control but also saves costs in the long term. What is more, an overwhelming majority of respondents to the report’s survey desired the switch to greater control.

First, the report emphasises sustained employment, which is fundamental to achieving structure and coherence in life. That is why the report suggests that an autism employment ambassador should be created to champion among employers the importance of employing people with autism. As we have heard, the statistics are shocking: 24 per cent of those questioned in the research said that they had never been in paid employment and 66 per cent rely on financial support from family members. That is in stark contrast to the clear desire for self-sufficiency that comes through in the report.

Secondly, the report emphasises choice and control through developing the ability to self-advocate. As it is for some other groups, access to independent advocacy services must be a fundamental part of that. Access to clear

information about support options, and the opportunity to communicate with advocates and, later, to self-advocate, allows the individual to make independent choices and feel empowered when those choices improve their lives.

For any targeted approach to autism services to work, it is necessary to challenge the discrimination that many face in their daily lives. Thirdly, the report addresses the barriers faced in the workplace, in the process of accessing services and in the educational environment. Many believe that achieving a wider and more thorough understanding of autism in the general community is vital if those barriers are to be overcome. I certainly take that view. The report suggests that a nationwide campaign to raise awareness is essential if autistic people are to feel able to integrate into various social and work situations without being victimised or misunderstood.

Finally, we must ensure that timely diagnosis is possible through increasing professional knowledge of the key signs of the condition. It is vital that autistic people feel able to trust and confide in service providers. Increasing understanding of symptoms is a key starting point for that. Correct diagnosis is the precondition of the appropriate post-diagnostic support that is advocated in the report.

Mindroom, a wonderful charity based in my constituency, which I visited quite recently, highlights that there are at least five children with some form of learning disability in every classroom in Scotland and that the characteristics associated with autism are apparent most often before the age of three. Education of our professional community must not end with general practitioners and healthcare workers but must extend to our teachers and nursery staff. A confident and empowered adult stems from a self-assured and supported child. In recognising that, let us aim continually to improve support for people of all ages as we implement the national autism strategy. I am pleased to join Mark McDonald in commending the report and the work done to date, and I commend the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members to be courteous to those who have stayed for tonight’s debate and not to chat through their speeches.

17:22

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I, too, thank Mark McDonald for bringing the motion to Parliament and allowing us to debate the report, “Count us in: it pays to listen.”

As many members have, I have had to deal with constituents who have family members who have

been diagnosed with autism. All of them are looking for additional support and many are struggling to get any form of support at all. Having no prior knowledge of local voluntary support groups in their area, they seek guidance to help them to provide the best possible care for their loved ones.

That is why we must welcome the Scottish Government's investment of £13.4 million over the next four years. I hope that it will help to improve the situation for adults and children with autism by providing the means for agencies to help to implement appropriate resources and strategies, where necessary. It will also help families who, although dedicated and committed to looking after loved ones with autism, are sometimes under pressure, as are lone parents, who often feel isolated and unable to cope.

"Count us in: it pays to listen" highlights the challenges that face the 50,000 Scots with autism, and calls for a greater working partnership between the Government, local authorities and support organisations. Listening to people with autism and their families can bring about meaningful change that impacts on their quality of life.

The national survey shows that 91 per cent want more say in their support; that 79 per cent think that the public's understanding of autism is poor or very poor; that 69 per cent of adults with autism have not had an assessment of their needs since turning 18; and that 66 per cent feel that they do not have enough support. That is why it is important that people with autism and their families are listened to and their recommendations taken into account. If they are allowed to take part in planning future services, that can highlight the conditions that they have to deal with daily.

The four main areas in the report—"Sustained employment", "Choice and control", "Challenging discrimination" and "Professional knowledge and access to support"—all show the need for greater partnership working to provide the services that people with autism and their families want and need if they are to get appropriate support.

A theme that runs through the report is that there is a lack of understanding by service providers and employers, and a lack of training in the health service to facilitate quicker recognition of signs of autism in order to implement practices that are needed to provide adequate support to individuals. In the research, 27 per cent of respondents said that they had been misdiagnosed and 23 per cent said that it had taken three years to get diagnosed, which equates to stressful times for individuals and their families.

I have had the privilege on several occasions of visiting in Kirkcaldy the new Scottish Autism

outreach base, which was opened in 2011. The base was suggested by parents and users who thought that there was a need for it in the Kirkcaldy area. The staff and volunteers must be congratulated on providing services that are designed to meet the needs of those who use them. The base offers social areas and a wide variety of activities such as food preparation, menu planning, budgeting, art work, music therapy and information technology access, all of which are designed to follow the individual's support plan.

I thank the National Autistic Society Scotland for its excellent report and for highlighting the experiences and difficulties that people with autism and their families have in accessing a range of appropriate services. The report also highlights the lack of understanding in many sectors of the community of the needs of those with autism. If those needs were addressed, that would help to enhance the quality of life of people with autism.

It is essential that we engage with and listen to people and families who deal daily with autism, so that we hear how it affects their lives in order that we can provide them with the future that they deserve.

17:26

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Mark McDonald for securing a debate on the "Count us in: it pays to listen" report, and I welcome the work of the National Autistic Society in preparing such an excellent report.

For all the progress that we as parliamentarians have made in how we recognise the needs of people with autism, it is surely our subtle change of perspective that is most valuable. Across the chamber, we have become positive—perhaps even optimistic—about the potential of autistic people to live independent lives, based on respect for their different outlook, and on recognition of the support that they require. It is worth taking a little time to reflect on that cultural shift, because taken beyond autism it shows a belief in the centrality of the individual. The same approach has inspired work in Parliament on self-directed support and— even more broadly—in personalisation of public services.

We now also clearly acknowledge the enormous variation in the symptoms of autism among individuals, which is an important basis for greater understanding of the condition. We are no longer trying to shoehorn autistic people into our own standards of normality or—which was even worse—carrying out the invidious practices of mass institutionalisation or segregation of autistic people from society. However, we should not

forget that it was not always so, and that in many countries around the world—even developed ones—approaches that we in Scotland have relegated to the past are still accepted.

Living an independent life will not always be possible for every person with autism, but there is little doubt that improvements can be made. Independent living will certainly be one of the barometers against which Government policy in this area is measured.

The number of people with autistic spectrum disorder who are currently in employment is one part of the mix that can be looked at, and I am attracted by the proposals for an autism employment ambassador. The barriers to employment that are mentioned in the report are particularly striking. Given that more than a third of participants clearly identified inequitable treatment in the workplace, in addition to the other challenges that they face, it is not difficult to see how a person's self-esteem can drop or their feelings of isolation increase, driving them away from employment.

I am pleased that the National Autistic Society encourages us to believe that there can be real policy-driven change in this area. We can take heart from how much difference national approaches have made in education for people with autism in a relatively short time.

A modern and recognisable understanding of the needs of young people with autism crystallised only in the 1970s. Countries such as Sweden that have adapted their approaches accordingly have seen high numbers of autistic children educated in the school environment. In others, however, autistic children still do not have the support to meet their school and education needs. Although in Scotland there has been significant progress in early diagnosis and support for children with autism, we heard this morning that many adults on the spectrum remain undiagnosed and without the help and support that they need.

A successful outcome for people with autism—whether they are children or adults—will be underpinned by how effectively support is provided. What we stand to gain will be measured in improvements to quality of life, but it can also be analysed in economic terms by what has been called the invest-to-save agenda.

Much has been written about the possible advantages of microsegmentation of the autistic population, which involves recognising and adapting to the different categories, abilities and challenges that are part of this very individual condition. There is a great deal of promise in that method of tailoring services and in the possibility of driving forward the personalisation agenda in that way. There is still much to do to demonstrate

the practicalities of wider implementation of the approach. It is welcome that the autism spectrum disorder reference group has taken forward the research seriously.

We must work towards bringing together changed attitudes and improved and better-directed support across all levels of public service, in order to identify the particular needs that arise from the individual challenges that autism presents. The report is a useful contribution to the debate and I congratulate Mark McDonald on bringing it before us.

17:30

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I add my thanks and congratulations to Mark McDonald on securing the debate. I will pick up on two aspects of the “Count us in” report: partnership working and challenging negative attitudes. I will marry those aspects to the national autism strategy, which the Government produced 18 months ago. My remarks will be based on the Asperger's end of the spectrum, because I know quite a lot about that.

The parliamentary reception that Mark McDonald hosted and to which he referred was an affirming event to attend. At the reception, I met young men with Asperger's. They were there, whereas most of the young men in their 20s with Asperger's whom I know would find it difficult to get out and come to an intimidating place such as that reception.

It was really interesting to meet those young folk and hear about the support that the National Autistic Society is giving them. A couple of the young men were constituents of mine. Their parents were also at the reception, and I heard from the parents about the support that the society had given the young men to take them through school and through the transition to being young men in their 20s who, as a group, go to the pictures and can come to the Parliament on the train, for instance.

It is important to mention that, because folk do not understand what autism can do to people—people do not understand how isolating it can be for individuals who are on the autistic spectrum. In relation to partnership working, I am pleased that one goal of the third strand of the national autism strategy is to work towards meaningful partnerships, which are important.

Meaningful partnerships are also important in challenging negative attitudes. “Count us in” makes a big thing of talking about ensuring that we challenge negative attitudes in the public. Mark McDonald referred to the autism meltdown in the supermarket. Any toddler meltdown is awful, but that one is worse than most.

It is also important that we challenge negative attitudes among our services. Partnership working will perhaps lead towards that. I remember way back when a two-year-old with undiagnosed Asperger's and his parents were told by his nursery teachers that he was a rude boy. The labelling of any two-year-old as rude tells us something about the people who are working with that child but, when the child has autism, there is a fundamental issue. That should have been a trigger to make professionals say, "Wait a wee minute—what's going on here? Should we investigate further?"

Twenty years on from those nursery teachers, I am sure that things are a lot better. With partnership working, I am sure that we can challenge negative attitudes in professions as well. I see that goal number 4 of the second strand of the autism strategy is that people with autism should be

"met with recognition and understanding".

That approach cannot come quickly enough. I do not want to bring too much dissent to the debate—actually, what I am saying is not dissent. Under the welfare changes, people who are on the autistic spectrum and who receive incapacity benefit and disability living allowance will face reassessments by a computer-driven system that is run by Atos Healthcare, and they will find it incredibly difficult to have their needs understood.

I congratulate Mark McDonald and thank him again.

17:35

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): As other members have done, I congratulate Mark McDonald on securing time for the debate and on giving the Parliament the opportunity to consider some of the issues that are highlighted in the "Count us in: it pays to listen" report. I welcome the publication of the report, particularly because of the way in which the National Autistic Society has listened to the views of those with autism in shaping some of the key issues that are highlighted in the report.

As Mark McDonald mentioned, I attended the recent parliamentary reception and, like Fiona McLeod, I found it affirming. It was a good opportunity to highlight the content of the report and it allowed those who were involved in helping to shape it to engage with elected members and to discuss their views and aspirations.

One key aspect of the report and the work that the National Autistic Society has undertaken is the way in which it has looked at the issue of autism across Scotland and considered what quality of life means for individuals with autism and what

changes they would like. The driving force behind that approach is that the society very much believes that individuals with autism are experts in their own right about their condition. The society is completely correct on that. As in many other areas such as caring, the experts in the field are often those who have direct personal experience. The report sets out the views and aspirations of those with autism and what they want to be put in place.

Members have referred to the four key recommendations in the report. One is on sustained employment and the appointment of an autism employment ambassador to help to provide opportunities for people with autism in workplaces. Local authorities can do work on that.

The second recommendation is on choice and control, which is about effective transition planning and support after diagnosis to enable people with autism to self-advocate. The third is on challenging discrimination, which Mark McDonald highlighted. Many people with autism often experience negative attitudes and a lack of understanding and appreciation.

The fourth recommendation is on improving professional knowledge and access to support in local authorities, the health service and other services. Those bodies have an important role in helping to address issues of social exclusion and to challenge issues that might be causing difficulties for individuals with autism and their families and carers.

The Government is committed to seeking to improve the lives of people with autism and their families and carers in Scotland. In November 2011, I launched the Scottish strategy for autism, which was undertaken in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. If we are to achieve the type of change that I believe is necessary, the key part of the strategy will be partnership working between the statutory and third sectors collectively to deliver the necessary change.

If any strategy, whether it be on autism, carers or mental health, does not create real change on the ground for individuals, their families and carers, the words on the page mean very little. I am determined to ensure that the autism strategy delivers real change that has a positive effect on the lives of individuals with autism and on their carers and families. Local authorities have an important part to play in delivering that. Linda Fabiani highlighted a good example of the need to ensure that services operate in a joined-up way that offers carers the best opportunity to continue their caring role.

To help to deliver some aspects of the strategy, the Scottish Government made an investment of £13.4 million of funding over the next four years.

One part of that is the autism development fund of £1.5 million per annum, which is being made available to local and national organisations to allow them to deliver local services on the ground. To date, 53 organisations across the country have benefited from that funding.

Other initiatives are being funded to drive forward the work of the strategy to address the gap in services and to achieve the strategy's two-year, five-year and 10-year goals, including the roll-out of six new one-stop shops across the country, funding for training courses, and investment in a 10-month national mapping project.

That mapping project will be extremely important in helping us to identify what services exist, where the gaps are, and what action needs to be taken at the local level to address the issues. Only yesterday, I met representatives from a local autism initiative in my constituency, which continues to be challenged by gaps in services. If we are to make progress, it is important that we identify those gaps. It is equally important that, when individuals are diagnosed with autism, they and their carers and families have somewhere to go to get information about the services that are available. The one-stop shops have a key role in helping to deliver that.

The one-stop shop in Edinburgh has already been established, and I had the pleasure of opening the one-stop shop in Glasgow a few weeks ago. There is one in Fife, and the Lanarkshire one opened on 8 March. Other one-stop shops are being planned for Grampian, Highlands, Tayside and Ayrshire. The Highlands shop will open very soon and the others will open later in the spring.

We have also been providing support to research areas to increase our understanding of autism. I am keen to see progress in research into waiting times for people who are waiting for a diagnosis, and we are providing funding to assist the progress of that research.

Mark McDonald referred to the fact that I have asked the national ASD reference group to look at the recommendations in the "Count us in: it pays to listen" report to see how we can implement them as part of the delivery of our autism strategy. Since its launch, the strategy has started to make a difference, but I recognise that much more remains to be done in the area. Working along with our partners in the third sector and local government, and with those who have autism and their families, we can continue to make progress. The Government is committed to implementing its strategy in the coming years and delivering the change that many individuals are looking for.

Meeting closed at 17:42.

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