



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 16 April 2013

Session 4

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 16 April 2013*

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

## Time for Reflection

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

Good afternoon. The first item of business today is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Professor A C Grayling, master of the New College of the Humanities, London.

**Professor A C Grayling:** Presiding Officer and members of this Parliament, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

My mother's maiden name was Burns and her birthday was 25 January. That gives me a small claim on Scottishness, and thereby on the great inheritance of the Scottish enlightenment and, in particular, on that of one of its greatest thinkers, David Hume. That is the more especially agreeable because Hume's view of ethics is proving to have been very prescient: he located the basis of benevolence and justice, the two great pillars of morality, in human nature itself, and today we see the emergence of powerful scientific support for that view in our understanding of humanity's place in the natural world. The terms "sociobiology" and "evolutionary psychology" are bandied about in discussions of human nature's continuity with the rest of nature; but whatever labels we use, we now have every reason to acknowledge that good and ill alike arise from facts about our biological history.

The most important fact is that we are essentially social beings. We need each other; we need companionship and community, we need to give and receive love, and we need to co-operate and agree. The heartening fact is that these fundamental needs of our psychology give us what is the majority story of human moral experience. Our news media are full of strife, mayhem and atrocity, but that is because these things are indeed news, which is to say that they are the minority story of human experience. The main story is that in every city, town and village everywhere in the world, every minute of each day, there are millions of acts of courtesy and kindness, friendship and help: that is our basic human reality, against which the tribulations that arise from division and discord must be set.

Those discords are largely the result of our giving too much influence to tribalisms of one kind or another. Given the things that all human beings share in the way of the needs that I mentioned, it is clear that we could—if we applied the resources necessary—bring people together to make us

collegial sharers of our one world in kindness and agreement. David Hume thought in those terms, and the advance of inquiry is showing that both he and we are right to place our best hopes in that aspect of human nature.

## Business Motion

14:02

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06235, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme. I ask any member who wishes to speak against the motion to press their request-to-speak button now. No one having done so, I call Joe FitzPatrick to move the motion.

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick):** The revision is to our business for this week, which was originally agreed on Tuesday 26 March by the Parliamentary Bureau. However, following further discussions at the bureau this morning, it was agreed to move the Green Party and Independent group debate from Wednesday to Thursday and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee debate from Thursday to Wednesday.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 17 April and Thursday 18 April 2013—

Wednesday 17 April

delete

*followed by* Scottish Green Party and Independent Group Debate: There is Still Such a Thing as Society

and insert

*followed by* Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee Debate: Public Procurement Reform

Thursday 18 April

delete

2.30 pm Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee Debate: Public Procurement Reform

and insert

2.30 pm Scottish Green Party and Independent Group Debate: There is Still Such a Thing as Society.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Topical Question Time

14:04

### Cremation

**1. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will update legislation and guidance to ensure that ashes are always treated appropriately following cremation. (S4T-00311)

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** Losing a loved one is a painful experience and to grieve their loss means, during the mix of joy and agony, remembering their life and living with the memory of them. When the loss is of a child, the pain and grief are amplified because of the futility of the passing of a life never fully lived.

I believe that the recent cases of the treatment of ashes of very young children demonstrate that the existing legislation and current industry practice are falling short of what the public deserve. Today, I announce that I am establishing an independent commission to examine the policies and practices that are in place for handling ashes and cremated remains. The commission will be tasked with producing recommendations before the end of this year to inform new legislation and guidance on cremation and burials. Central to the new legislation will be that it must ensure a consistent approach to the treatment of ashes throughout Scotland and that families are treated sensitively and given the support and information that they need.

**Sandra White:** I sincerely thank the minister for that reply. I am sure that the many people who have contacted me and others will sincerely thank him also, particularly given that the legislation that underpins much of this is more than 100 years old.

Does the minister agree that local authorities such as Glasgow City Council must not shy away from their responsibility to investigate any case that is brought to them and give answers to parents? Will the Scottish Government provide best practice guidance to local authorities on the conduct of their investigations, and will the minister ask the national health service to co-operate with any local investigations?

**Michael Matheson:** I agree. It is important that local authorities and other owners of crematoria are accountable for their historical practice. They must respond to any complaints or concerns that are raised by individuals or families, and they should duly investigate those complaints or concerns.

I confirm that the Government will provide advice and information to local authorities around best practice in undertaking such investigations or any audits that may be required as a result of complaints that they have received. I also confirm that the national health service will comply fully with any local investigation that takes place.

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** I have been making representations on the issue to Glasgow City Council since I was contacted by a constituent, and I welcome the minister's comments about establishing a commission to consider the legislative situation.

I agree that each local authority needs to examine its practices and be clear that the information has been provided to individuals who have concerns. Does the minister share my view that part of people's concern relates to the fact that different practices have been followed in different parts of the country and that, for that reason, national co-ordination is needed regarding the investigation of complaints as well as regarding the consideration of any legislative proposals?

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the point that the member raises, particularly in relation to the recent case in Glasgow that was highlighted by my colleague Nicola Sturgeon on behalf of her constituent, who raised an issue of concern that I believe Glasgow City Council should investigate. The City of Edinburgh Council has set out a very good way in which that type of investigation can be undertaken independently to inform the council of any issues that may have arisen through its practice. I encourage Glasgow City Council to reflect on the measures that are being taken by the City of Edinburgh Council in considering the approach that it could take to investigating the particular case that has been highlighted by Nicola Sturgeon.

The member talked about inconsistency in practice, which is an issue that I have concerns about. It is important that there is consistency in approach regarding how ashes from the cremation process are handled for young children. I am anxious to ensure that the commission is able to look at what practice has given rise to the inconsistency that has occurred in different local authority areas as well as, potentially, private crematoria, so that it can make recommendations that will allow us to produce legislation and guidance to ensure that a consistent approach is taken across the country.

**Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the minister's response to Sandra White's question and the establishment of the commission. He will be aware of concerns that have been raised around the policies that are in place at Aberdeen crematorium. The situation has

led to the parents of babies who are born asleep and those who have miscarried becoming confused and uncertain whether they might have been entitled to receive ashes following cremation, and such uncertainty has reopened grief for many. Does the minister anticipate the commission making clear recommendations for situations in which the return of ashes is not possible that would provide clarity and, in many cases, closure for parents?

**Michael Matheson:** One of the commission's roles will be to ensure that there is consistency in the information that is provided to families on whether ashes may be available or are not available at that particular point. I understand that there are a number of technical issues that may affect whether ashes are available, but it is important that families are informed of that at the very start of the process, that the process is transparent, and that families can have confidence in it. One role that the commission will have is to explore the different practices and policies that have been taken forward in different crematoria in the country in order to ensure that there is a consistent approach and consistency in the information that is provided to parents at that time.

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** The minister referred to the City of Edinburgh Council investigation as a good model of how things could work. I remind the minister that that investigation is not properly under way yet, and that it cannot proceed until the police have concluded their investigations.

I have eight constituents whose lives are currently devastated by the revelations at Mortonhall. They want answers, justice and a public inquiry. Why is the minister not willing to have a public inquiry? I welcome his announcement, but those parents will take some comfort from an assurance from the minister that their voices will be heard by the commission and specifically that it will be able to call witnesses and that they will be asked to give answers.

**Michael Matheson:** It is important to remember that the police investigation is the reason that the City of Edinburgh Council's investigation has not been able to take the full range of evidence that it would have liked to take at this stage. It is important that that due process is recognised, because of the potential for using evidence at a later stage, should any criminal prosecutions take place.

I understand that Dame Elish Angiolini and her team have undertaken preliminary work to look at issues that they can establish at an early stage and which do not impinge on the police investigation. Dame Elish Angiolini's independence in undertaking that investigation into the historical practices at Mortonhall provides

a good model that other local authorities, such as Glasgow City Council, could use in considering issues of concern that have been raised.

The purpose of the commission is to look at what practices and policies gave rise to the situation occurring in the first place. Its purpose is to establish that and then look at what measures are necessary to ensure that the situation does not happen again and that a consistent approach is taken across all our crematoria in Scotland, and by those in the NHS who may be involved in the process and those in the funeral care industry. It is important that we have a consistent approach and that we look at involving a number of individuals who can provide the support and advice that are necessary to take that forward.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I welcome that answer, but the minister did not respond to the point about how he will ensure that parents' voices are heard in the process.

**Michael Matheson:** I said that I intend to have commission members who can help to ensure that the process includes as many individuals as possible in considering what practice issues need to be addressed with any future legislation. I will consider who can be on the commission and who could represent parents and their interests when it comes to appointing the commission.

### **"Shaping Scotland's Court Services"**

**2. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report "Shaping Scotland's Court Services". (S4T-00304)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** I am considering the proposals and recommendations in that report and will make an announcement shortly.

**John Lamont:** The cabinet secretary has been noticeably quiet since the publication of the Scottish Court Service's plans.

The SCS's report describes the closure of a fifth of Scotland's sheriff courts as "proportionate". I wonder what the reaction would have been if a public body had proposed closing a fifth of our schools or a fifth of our hospitals. Does the cabinet secretary appreciate the value of local justice and local courts, particularly in areas such as the Borders? Does he agree with 95 per cent of those who responded to the consultation that the proposals would be deeply harmful to the quality of Scotland's justice system?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I think that local justice is important. The matter has been given deep consideration by the Scottish Court Service under the leadership of the Lord President, who is our most senior judge.

However, we face tough financial times and significant cuts from the Westminster Government. I would have more sympathy for Mr Lamont were it not for the contrast between the position in Scotland and the position south of the border, where 93 magistrates courts and 49 county courts have closed and where the English Borders region has seen the closure of the courts at Alnwick, Penrith and Whitehaven. Mr Lamont should read it from that that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Court Service are doing what they can in the face of an austerity budget that has been imposed on us by a London Government that happily closes courts in the English Borders and which has closed significantly more courts south of the border than the Lord President and the Scottish Court Service are considering doing north of the border.

**John Lamont:** I am a member of the Scottish Parliament and the minister is a member of the Scottish Government, so I would be grateful if he could restrict his remarks to dealing with the questions that I put to him, instead of trying to answer on behalf of the United Kingdom Government.

In recent months, there have been two related consultations. The Scottish Court Service consultation, which proposed the closure of several sheriff courts, closed in December 2012, and in February 2013 the Scottish Government published a new draft Courts Reform (Scotland) Bill, which will transfer a significant number of civil cases from the Court of Session to the remaining sheriff courts. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that the Government's proposals will simply add to the pressures on those sheriff courts that survive his closure plans?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The member makes an important point, because two consultations are under way, but let us remember that more than 94 per cent of all civil cases are already heard in the sheriff courts. Only a small minority of them are heard in our higher courts. Those matters have been fully factored into the Scottish Court Service's consideration of the situation.

Regardless of the position that Mr Lamont may take, cognisance must be taken of the financial pressures that court services north and south of the border face. However, account must also be taken of reducing pressures on the courts. Let us look at the example of Duns sheriff court, where last year the number of summary trials in which evidence was led was 12 and the number of ordinary proofs that proceeded was zero. There comes a time when the Scottish Court Service must not only live within the budget that has been imposed on it as a result of the cuts from Westminster, but take account of the volume of business. Frankly, there comes a time when the



reduction in the volume of business is such that consolidation is necessary.

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** The consultation has shown the considerable concerns that my constituents in Sutherland and Ross-shire have about the possible closure of the Dornoch and Dingwall sheriff courts. What provision can be made for the use of videoconferencing in rural areas such as the Highlands to compensate for the greater travelling distances that the proposed court changes will result in?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The member makes an important point. The Scottish Court Service and the Government are giving the matter appropriate and significant consideration. Under the making justice work programme, work is nearing completion in the north of Scotland that will result in the introduction of a new, secure, live-link videoconferencing network that will include six northern courts and four other locations. That work, which will be completed next month, will give criminal justice organisations the opportunity to use the technology for some cases. For the benefit of the member, I inform him that the six locations in question are Aberdeen, Elgin, Inverness, Kirkwall, Lerwick and Stornoway.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** As well as proposing the closure of Cupar sheriff court, the report states that jury trials in Kirkcaldy will stop, which will put significant pressure on victims and witnesses who live in the Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes area. It will also increase the probability of court delays and reduce access to local justice. What discussion has the cabinet secretary had with the Scottish Court Service on that proposal, which, unlike the proposed closures, will not require parliamentary approval? Does he share my concern that the removal of jury trials from Kirkcaldy will have a negative impact on witnesses and victims?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I have regular discussions with the Scottish Court Service, the Lord President and the chief executive. Those matters have been factored in. It is not simply the case that, as Mr Lamont said, some civil matters that are currently dealt with in the higher courts will go to the sheriff courts. Changes are taking place in where sheriff and jury trials should be conducted and, indeed, in where the High Court should hold trials. Those matters have been factored in and taken account of. We should have greater trust and faith in the Lord President and the Scottish Court Service.

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** I ask the minister to look carefully at the proposals for the court closure in Stonehaven. In particular, he must address the cogent arguments raised about the capacity of Aberdeen to absorb the extra work, especially when taken in conjunction with

the High Court proposals. Nearly all the respondents commented that Aberdeen sheriff court suffers from endemic delays. Surely the minister agrees that further pressure added to that will make it very difficult. I ask him to reject the closure of Stonehaven sheriff court.

**Kenny MacAskill:** Alison McInnes raises an important point. Clearly, that is a matter that must be factored in. It would be fair to say that the business conducted in Stonehaven is more than that conducted in Duns but, for the record, in 2012 it had 34 trials at summary level in which evidence was led, and four civil proofs. That is perhaps not a number that would be incapable of being soaked up in Aberdeen, where there is greater specialisation.

I will reflect on those matters but, as I say, we face significant financial challenges. Those must be dealt with by the Scottish Court Service as they are being dealt with by its counterparts south of the border. Equally, we must recognise that, even though some business is being reallocated, less business is going through our courts. The Scottish Court Service must take that into account, given the complexity and specialisation of the legal world in which we find ourselves.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** Local justice has been dispensed in the town of Haddington for hundreds of years. The SCS received 150 substantial submissions and thousands of pleas from East Lothian citizens that that should continue, but it chose to ignore them. Will the cabinet secretary undertake to reconsider the submissions, pay attention to the wishes of my constituents and remove Haddington from the hit list of closures?

**Kenny MacAskill:** We appear to be in ascending order. I will give cognisance to Mr Gray's position on Haddington, as I said I would with regard to John Lamont's and Alison McInnes's positions. For the record, in 2012 the number of summary trials on which evidence was led and the trial proceeded was 41. That is not even one trial a week. The number of civil ordinary proofs that proceeded was five, which is more than there are seasons, but only by one.

I will take that into account, but we have a position in which many trials that would be scheduled for Haddington go to Edinburgh, including those related to sheriff and jury, and especially those relating to children. However, having heard Jenny Marra, it appears to me that Labour's position is that no cuts can be made to the court or legal aid budgets and that the only cuts that we should make are those to the number of police officers. I will make it clear at the Scottish Police Federation conference tomorrow that we will not be cutting police officer numbers.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland)**

**(Lab):** The Scottish Court Service's report focuses on savings for the court service. Will the cabinet secretary also take into account in his consideration the impact of court closures as proposed on the local economy of county towns?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Yes. Those are matters that I will discuss with Cabinet colleagues.

The First Minister, who normally stands here, and I grew up in Linlithgow. When I first started practising law—indeed, when I embarked on a legal career—the West Lothian county court was in Linlithgow. I must say that Linlithgow has gone from strength to strength, notwithstanding the quite understandable move to Livingston because that is where the business is—perhaps Mr Gray would take that point into account, given the overwhelming pressure on Haddington sheriff court from business that comes from Tranent, Musselburgh and Prestonpans, where it is easier and quicker in many instances to get to Edinburgh than to the old county town.

## Universal Services

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06225, in the name of John Swinney, on universal services.

14:24

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney):**

The programme for Government that was published in September 2012 set out the Scottish Government's ambitious vision of the nation that Scotland should be in future: a prosperous and successful country, reflecting Scottish values of fairness and opportunity and promoting equality and social cohesion.

That vision guides the policies that the Scottish Government is taking forward across all our public services, through the Government's economic strategy, and is reflected in the choices that we set out in the spending review in 2011 and in our budget for this year, which was agreed by Parliament in February.

A key part of the vision is the social contract that the Government has made with the people of Scotland. Everyone recognises that the public finances are under pressure—indeed, we have just been discussing some of the implications of those pressures. At a time when many people in Scotland are facing hardship and change, the Government is determined that a focus on ensuring the quality and stability of public services for people in Scotland is at the heart of the decisions that we take.

It is nearly two years since the First Minister, in his opening statement of the new parliamentary session, set out a range of measures that support the Scottish Government's commitment to a social wage, including the protection of a number of vital universal benefits and services that affect individuals in our country. Provisions included the council tax freeze; continued support for free personal care; the abolition of tuition fees; free prescriptions and eye tests; the continuation of concessionary bus travel; and an increase in the amount of free nursery care that is available to our citizens.

Many of those provisions have been introduced with the broad agreement of Parliament over the years of devolution. The Government brings forward this debate to take forward wider agreement on those important public services.

At a time when Scotland must come to terms with the further reductions in public spending that were set out in the recent United Kingdom Government budget, coupled with the UK

Government's welfare reforms, today's debate provides Parliament with an opportunity to consider the agenda that the Government is taking forward and gives me the opportunity to confirm that the Scottish Government remains committed to the course that was set out in the spending review, given the choices that we have made about financial support for public services in Scotland.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I share many of the ambitions that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has set out, but I want to have confidence that we can sustain such policies into the future. Others have argued for 10-year projections on many policies. Will the cabinet secretary agree to that today?

**John Swinney:** That is the subject of Mr Brown's amendment and a point that Mr Brown has made in the past. I will not agree to that today, because, in essence, that would involve my talking about one element of our budget, when our budget is a much broader and more comprehensive proposition. Indeed, we will not have all the financial information that would enable us to set out that comprehensive picture.

I say to Mr Rennie that the Government, having gone through the exercise of commissioning the independent budget review—which, for the record, provided a list of suggestions for improving the sustainability of the public finances, to a greater degree than we required to implement—and having taken forward the work of the Christie commission on the future delivery of public services, has taken steps to ensure that the public finances are sustainable and that we can take forward the variety of measures to which the Government is committed as part of the balanced budget that we have set. I will set out those steps during the course of my speech.

**Willie Rennie:** What the cabinet secretary said is puzzling. If he is relying so much on the independent budget review, why did he reject so many of the review panel's recommendations, which were based on sustainability?

**John Swinney:** The point that I just made to Mr Rennie is that the independent budget review provided a list of options in excess of the savings that we required to make, so I was not obliged to accept the entirety of the panel's suggestions. I accepted and subsequently implemented a series of challenging recommendations, to make the public finances of the Scottish Government sustainable and to enable us to ensure that members of the public are not the first to suffer as a consequence of the tightening financial constraints within which we operate.

**Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con):** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for taking a third intervention so quickly.

The cabinet secretary said that it would be difficult to provide 10-year projections and that perhaps too much work would need to be done if we were to do so. However, does he acknowledge that he provided projections to the independent budget review in 2010? Why cannot he do longer-term projections now?

**John Swinney:** Some of the information that we provided to the independent budget review was provided at its request but, as I tried to suggest in my response to Mr Rennie—which is the point that I have always maintained in my response to Mr Brown on these matters—the sustainability of individual elements of the public services will be dependent on the variety of budget choices that we make. In order to present that information in the round—comprehensively—the Government would need 10-year financial information from the UK Government. As that information is not forthcoming, I do not see the purpose of the exercise. The Government's duty is to ensure that the decisions that we take—and which we have taken—enable the public finances to be sustainable as a consequence of the agenda that the Scottish Parliament takes forward.

The Government's approach is founded on our belief in a fair and equitable society and our wider conviction that, with our investment approach to our policies, the steps that we take will improve the outcomes experienced by members of the public. There is a sharp contrast between the approach to and direction of public policy in many of these areas of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government and the approach of the UK Government to welfare reform. The Scottish Government is doing what it can to mitigate the worst effects of welfare reform. With our local government partners, we have invested £40 million to address the funding gap in council tax support this year after the UK Government reduced the budget by 10 per cent. We are also providing an extra £9.2 million for the Scottish welfare fund, which makes a total of £33 million and will allow us to award an additional 5,600 community care grants and an additional 100,000 crisis grants to the groups who need it most. We are also providing a £5.4 million funding package to organisations who provide front-line advice and support services to those affected and a further £2.5 million to social landlords to ensure that those affected by housing benefit changes get the necessary advice and support. Through such measures, we seek to advance our agenda of tackling inequality in our society, an inequality that we believe will be exacerbated by the UK Government's welfare reform agenda.

Of course, that approach is consistent with our response to the analysis of the Christie commission, which focused on how we might tackle inequalities in Scotland and pointed us in the direction, which the Government has accepted, of shifting to a series of more preventative and anticipatory approaches that will first and foremost improve the outcomes experienced by members of the public by reducing demand and improving access to public services. The Christie commission's report placed a heavy emphasis on preventative interventions, on partnership working between public services at local level—which is implicit in the health and social care reforms that Mr Neil is taking forward—on greater investment in the people who deliver public services and on improving performance in public services, and all those attributes have been recognised in how the Government has taken forward this agenda.

To address the points made by Mr Rennie and Mr Brown, I note that in order to ensure the sustainability of the public finances we required 3 per cent efficiency savings to be made across Scotland's public sector. In line with the findings of the independent budget review, we have taken the difficult decision of constraining public sector pay costs, which account for around 55 per cent of the annual Scottish revenue budget, while at the same time offering protection for those on the lowest income and, crucially, providing as part of our social wage agreement with the public a no compulsory redundancy guarantee in Scotland's government community.

In addition to all of those steps, we have taken a range of other measures to ensure the sustainability of public services. For example, the establishment of a single police service for Scotland and a single fire and rescue service is designed not only to improve local services, to create more equal access to specialist support and to strengthen national capacity but to save resources for the public purse.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice talked a moment ago about the making justice work programme, which has been designed to create a fairer, accessible and efficient justice system that delivers savings into the bargain. We are embarking on a major restructuring of further education provision in Scotland and, through the work of the Minister for Children and Young People and the Minister for Public Health, we are taking forward the focus on the early years collaborative, to ensure that we anticipate some of the challenges that exist in future demand for services. The reshaping care change fund has been designed to, in essence, usher in the reforms that are required in the delivery of adult health and social care services in Scotland.

Those are some of the tough and difficult decisions that the Government has taken to ensure that our public services are sustainable. They have enabled us to make the commitments that have been given in the budget to ensure that the range of services that are available to members of the public—in a time of acute financial pressure—can be maintained.

In 2011, we removed prescription charges, saving those with long-term illnesses potentially around £104 per year in comparison with the level of prescription charges south of the border and ending what we consider to be an unfair tax on ill health. Some have argued that we should reconsider and introduce a means-tested approach, but the National Audit Office has demonstrated that the costs per claim of delivering means-tested benefits tend to be higher than those for contributory or universal benefits, even where benefits have similar target groups.

Freezing council tax has, in relative terms, most benefited households with the lowest income. The cumulative saving for an average household over the period 2008 to 2013 is more than £500 and, due to the extension of the freeze for the lifetime of this parliamentary session, the same household will benefit by around £1,200 in total, based on an additional £70 million being provided each year.

University education remains free in Scotland, which saves students up to £27,000 compared with the cost of studying in England from autumn 2012. We have seen record numbers of Scottish applicants to Scottish universities, while in the same time period we have seen drops in applications to English universities.

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service data shows that acceptances to Scottish institutions for 2012-13 are up by 1.9 per cent, compared with a 6.3 per cent decrease at English institutions.

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary is very happy to tell us about record numbers of applications to higher education. Will he tell us exactly how successful he has been with applications to Scotland's colleges and further education institutions?

**John Swinney:** Mr Macintosh will know full well that the Government made a commitment to maintain the number of full-time equivalent places at Scotland's colleges, and we have fulfilled that commitment. Yes, we have changed the shape of the provision: we have gone from a larger number of part-time courses to more full-time courses, which have been designed to strengthen the ability of younger people to enter the labour market with a more sophisticated and grounded level of skills. From the successive falls in youth unemployment that we have been experiencing, we are beginning

to see that the strategy is bearing fruit for the young people of Scotland.

We are committed to maintaining the progress made on free personal and nursing care and we have protected the health budget, which means that by 2014-15 the resource budget of the national health service will be more than £1 billion higher than it was in 2010-11.

We provide other services universally, including free eye tests, which RNIB Scotland estimated prevent costs that could be in excess of £17,646 per patient per year. The continuation of concessionary bus travel is a benefit to many of our older citizens' social mobility and personal wellbeing.

The Government has taken a series of difficult decisions to balance public finances, to ensure that we take wise steps to maintain their sustainability, and, crucially in a time of fiscal constraints, to protect the services that matter to the people of Scotland. That is the approach that this Government has chosen in order to give life to the values that we believe are important for the longer term benefit of Scotland. The provisions are contained in the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament confirms its opposition to the further reductions that have been made to the Scottish budget as a result of the UK budget on 20 March 2013 and the damaging impact that the UK Government's approach to public spending is having on the economy, public services and households, including the most vulnerable in society, and supports the Scottish Government's continued commitment to both the social wage, including the universal benefits of free personal care, free prescriptions, concessionary travel, free eye tests and free tuition, and to the four pillars of public service reform, which together will help to ensure that the totality of public spending provides value for money, is sustainable and delivers the outcomes that matter most to Scotland's people and businesses.

14:39

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** It is great to be back after the Easter recess—

**Members:** It is great to have you back.

**Ken Macintosh:** I thank members on the Scottish National Party benches for that warm welcome.

I believe that the SNP has secured this debate not so much with a view to taking a rigorous look at the public finances as with the express aim—or, I should say, the hope—of trying to embarrass the Labour Party. I will be honest though. Far from making any political capital, the embarrassment is that of the SNP.

The subject of universal services has been considered in depth by the Christie commission, in the Beveridge report and, of course, by the

Scottish Labour Party. It would appear that the only party that has not taken the issue seriously is the SNP, and yet it is the party of government. Even the language that the SNP uses says more about its mindset than it does about the Labour Party's approach. It is always talking about cuts rather than about the values of our public services or the needs of people in our community.

The very reason why it is important to look at how we deliver public services in this country is to protect those services. Many changes are taking place at the moment, not least those driven by the austerity agenda of the Tory Government at Westminster. Even if the SNP Government was to do or say nothing—although let us not kid ourselves, as it is already cutting all kinds of public support that is vital to so many lives—the shape of our public services would change, simply because demography and the nature of our society are changing. We want people to live longer, happier and healthier lives. To do that, we need to change the nature of how we deliver our services.

The Scottish Labour Party has tried to generate a public debate on public services, but we have not come to any firm conclusions yet as we review our stance on policy. That said, I hope that if I give my thoughts on one policy, concessionary travel, that might illustrate why it is important to have an open and honest discussion. First, let us remember that free travel for older people was introduced not by the SNP or the Tories but by the Scottish Labour Party. It is a Labour Party policy, delivered by a Labour-led Government, with huge benefits for older people in Scotland. It still ranks as one of our most important achievements. At the last election, it was in fact SNP candidates who threatened the bus pass for older people throughout the country.

**Members:** No!

**Ken Macintosh:** That is my recollection. Some of the loudest protesters are the ones who challenged the bus pass—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A little order, please.

**Ken Macintosh:** What is happening in practice? While on the face of it, the SNP Government remains committed to keeping concessionary travel, in practice it is drastically reducing its support for bus transport. It has already reduced the bus service operators grant and, crucially, the level of subsidy for the concessionary pass—from 67p in the pound to 58p in the pound. As all of us in the chamber and certainly all the people in our constituencies know, the net effect is that bus services are being cut. If they are honest, SNP back benchers know that, too. Just this week in my area, one of the most important routes has been cut from three times an hour to two times an

hour. Several communities are entirely isolated in the evenings. That picture is repeated throughout the country.

The trouble with the SNP's approach is that essentially it is making a political calculation that it can foist the blame on to someone else: it can blame the bus companies, local authorities or the Tory Government. I am not saying that each of those bodies does not have a role to play, but the key decisions are being taken by SNP ministers. The cuts to the bus operators grant and in the level of subsidy from 67p to 58p are hugely significant and are directly the responsibility of Scottish Government ministers.

The SNP is cut, cut, cutting all the time. In those circumstances, its supposed commitment to concessionary travel becomes a mask to hide behind rather than a genuine policy.

**Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP):** The member sets out his party's love for the concessionary travel scheme. Is that why his party refused to back the scheme when it was before the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee?

**Ken Macintosh:** If Mr Hepburn would allow me to finish my remarks, he will see where I am heading. If he has not been listening, he may have conveniently forgotten that it was us who introduced the policy. There is no question about our commitment to the free bus pass—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Ken Macintosh:** The question is about the SNP's commitment to decent public transport and decent services for older people in this country, which are being cut by the SNP.

The danger in not having an open and honest debate about the matter is that cuts will still happen, as they are happening now, but the agenda will be shaped by others. The language of the debate, for example, will be entirely that of the Tories—of reducing the supposed burden of the state.

I do not have to look far to illustrate my point. We have just seen the introduction of radical changes to disability living allowance predicated not on the basis of need but on the basis of cost to the public purse. The Tory Government claims that there will be a needs-based assessment, but the policy started from the basis that the department wanted to make cuts of 20 per cent and was then designed to deliver them. It is little wonder that people are so sceptical and that there is so little trust in the Tory Government.

If the SNP does not join the Labour Party in having a genuine discussion about how public services are shaped, we will not have services that

reflect our values. We will not have services that liberate older people, give us independence in later years and allow people to live longer, healthier lives. We will have public services that are seen entirely as a drag or a burden on society, not as something beneficial.

It is already far too easy to fall into the trap of saying that all taxation is bad and that the duty of Government is to keep spending to a minimum. Yes, public spending must be controlled, because it is too important to how we live our lives to treat irresponsibly, but taxation is the mark of living in a civilised society.

I cannot say what the conclusion of our review will be, but I will be astonished if it does not allow us to reaffirm the Scottish Labour Party's support for concessionary transport for older people that is delivered on an affordable and sustainable basis and which, in other words, secures bus services for older people rather than cutting them, which is what the SNP is doing.

Of course, the same argument that is made about buses could be made about education. The much-vaunted SNP commitment to free tuition, which I heard the minister repeat, is totally undermined by the fact that 120,000 fewer Scots are attending college. What sort of party trumpets access for some to higher education while slamming the door to further education for so many others? All the work that we did in the first decade of the Parliament on narrowing the gap between the vocational and the academic is being undermined by an elitist approach that seems to consider Scotland's colleges as a second-best option.

Precisely the same argument can be made about prescription charges. While ministers brag about free prescriptions, thousands of Scots are being denied access to medicines that are available throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. Scotland used to be at the forefront of making available new treatments for patients, but under the SNP we now enjoy the worst reputation in the UK. We are in the farcical and almost certainly unsustainable position of having a health minister who, instead of sorting out a robust and fair system for accessing drugs, is sitting here responding to bad headlines by finding £21 million from somewhere in his budget. Goodness knows, the money is welcome, but what would be far more welcome would be an individual patient treatment request system that actually works. I do not want the SNP to boast to me, the Parliament or patients across Scotland that it is providing free prescriptions for all when the price of that policy is no prescriptions for the few who desperately need help.

**John Swinney:** Will Mr Macintosh set out what the Labour Party's position is on the issue of

charging people with long-term conditions for their prescriptions?

**Ken Macintosh:** The Labour Party is in the middle of a policy review. We will be more than happy to contest elections on the basis of policies that we think the Scottish public will find attractive—genuine policies that will provide care for our older people—and, at the same time, to reveal the hypocrisy of an SNP Government that pretends to the Scottish public that it is protecting services while all the time it is undermining them. The system of free personal care that the Labour Government introduced is being undermined; it is now reduced to 15-minute care visits. I genuinely believe that the hallmark—the defining characteristic—of this SNP Government will be the 15-minute care visit. That is not genuine care for older people but a system that strips away respect, dignity and genuine warmth.

The SNP is hiding behind the front of alleged support for universalism, but all the while it is cutting those very services. However, there is something even more cynical, which is that we know that SNP ministers are having this very same debate but are keeping it secret from us. How do we know? Because the cabinet secretary, John Swinney, tells us so in the gift that keeps on giving—the leaked Cabinet paper with which John Swinney briefed his colleagues in secret.

I will quote from a number of paragraphs. Paragraph 27 says:

“there are also inherent real terms cost pressures within public sector budgets ... We will need to be mindful that these pressures could reduce the resources available to provide additional public services.”

Paragraph 29 says:

“All things being equal this means that some budgets will have to rise in real terms simply to ensure that demand for existing public services can be met.”

**John Swinney:** Yes—and your point is?

**Ken Macintosh:** In private, John Swinney and front-bench colleagues are having this debate—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A little courtesy, please, members.

**Ken Macintosh:** They are having a debate about the real pressures that are facing the Government.

What remedy does this same minister offer his colleagues? He says that we should

“consider the affordability of State Pensions”.

That has silenced SNP members. That has hit a nerve, has it? Considering the affordability of pensions is a bit more drastic than considering some public services.

I quote exactly—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** And also finally, please.

**Ken Macintosh:** He says that we should constrain total increases in pay-bill costs

“through management of the size of the workforce”.

What does that mean—managing the size of the public sector workforce? It means public sector job cuts.

We have here a Government that is basically saying that public sector jobs will go to save the political face of SNP ministers. That is not fair, it is not just and it does not protect the services or values of the people of Scotland. I urge Parliament to reject the minister’s cynical motion and to accept Labour’s amendment.

I move amendment S4M-6225.3, to leave out from “and supports” to end and insert:

“; notes the conclusions of the Independent Budget Review Panel and the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services and several comments by John Swinney in a Scottish Government Cabinet paper, including recognising that ‘there are also inherent real terms cost pressures within public sector budgets’; considers that the Scottish Government has presided over a postcode lottery in care services, a rise in care charges and cuts to local bus services, decisions that have had a severe impact on people across Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to engage in an honest and constructive debate about the future of public services to ensure that Scotland’s future public spending is both fair and sustainable.”

14:51

**Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con):** We must have the debate about universal services, and it would be best served if it was conducted openly and transparently. The debate is lacking an evidence base. The critical steps that it is incumbent on the Scottish Government to take are, first, to gather a clear evidence base on the projected costs of the universal services that we have in Scotland; secondly, to make an analysis of the benefits, so that we can compare the costs with the benefits; and thirdly, to make a comparison with other potential policy initiatives, so that the Parliament and the Government can decide on the correct priorities.

Because of the present financial settlement and the demographic challenges that we face as a country, doing nothing is not an option. I am surprised at the Scottish Government’s response to our reasonable—I think—request for 10-year projections of the likely costs of universal benefits. Surely to goodness that has to be a starting point in considering where we are likely to go and whether those benefits will be affordable in the medium and longer term.

I turn to the reasons that the cabinet secretary gave for not providing those projections—he will forgive me, as I had to scribble them down while he was speaking. The first reason was that the Government's budget is a wider proposition. That does not explain at all why he is unable or unwilling to give us projections of the likely costs of universal services. When I pointed out that he was able to give the information to the independent budget review in 2010, he said that he was able to do so because the review requested it—I hope that I do not misquote him, but he will correct me if I do. We in the Parliament are requesting now that he provide the information for a 10-year period, so that we can fairly judge the likely costs of the services.

When we have clear information in front of us, decisions can be taken on what the priorities ought to be. I do not accept the cabinet secretary's argument. He has claimed that, because he has not been given a 10-year budget from the UK Government, it is impossible for him to provide that information. He is nodding his head as I say that. I acknowledge that he has not been given a 10-year budget from the UK Government, but the point about universal services is that they are demand-driven engines in the budget. They depend on demand. We are asking what he thinks the demand and the cost of meeting that demand will be if there are no changes to the current schemes. We are not asking exactly how much the Scottish Government will spend on those services—

**John Swinney:** Ah!

**Gavin Brown:** The cabinet secretary says, "Ah!" Perhaps he will now stand up and tell us that he will give us the projected expenditure on those items if there are no changes to them. He seems unwilling to do so. I hope that, later in the debate, the Scottish Government will finally accede to our request to tell us the projected costs.

We face a well-known and well-documented financial challenge and that is likely to remain the case for the next few years. Many of the decisions about universal services were taken when we simply could not spend all the money that the Parliament had. In the Parliament's first two sessions, money built up in end-year flexibility because we could not spend it at the time.

The situation is different now. It is coupled with the demographic challenge about which the Finance Committee reported recently. There are also opportunities, of course, but that does not mean that we can ignore the challenges.

The National Records of Scotland said in written evidence to the Finance Committee that, by 2035, the working-age population would increase by 7 per cent, the pension-age population would

increase by 26 per cent and the number of those aged 75 or over would increase by 82 per cent. Such increases will clearly have an impact on the universal services that we have.

**Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):**

The member will appreciate that such projections are merely projections and that, for example, a well-honed, targeted immigration policy could address some of the issues. Does he agree that his party at Westminster does not have a well-honed, targeted immigration policy?

**Gavin Brown:** Mr McDonald makes a mistake, because our demographic challenge has been well documented for several decades—long before the coalition Government came to power. I realise that he was not on the Finance Committee when the report into the demographic challenge was published, but countries throughout western Europe and the first world have very similar problems to ours, regardless of their immigration policies. In fact, Germany, the Netherlands and Finland are expected to have a greater challenge than ours, according to figures that were given to the committee. I do not accept Mr McDonald's argument that immigration policy is at the heart of the issue.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Will Gavin Brown give way?

**Gavin Brown:** I have only 20 seconds left, so I am afraid that I will have to decline that intervention.

We face demographic challenges and difficult financial challenges. That is why it is important to target our resources where they are most needed. That would enable us to release savings to spend on other Government priorities.

We should stop providing universal services—particularly concessionary travel—when those who are willing to pay 100 per cent can well do so. As Robert Black, the former Auditor General, said on the concessionary travel scheme:

"the cost of providing free transport to people who are over 60 and still in employment is £34 million or so. That is dead-weight expenditure if ever I saw it."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 25 January 2012; c 587.]

I challenge anyone in the Parliament to say that there is not a better way of spending that £34 million in pursuing the Government's and the Parliament's priorities.

I move amendment S4M-06225.2, to leave out from "confirms" to end and insert:

"notes that many of the measures contained in the UK Government budget on 20 March 2013 have been welcomed across Scotland; is disappointed that the Scottish Government has failed to engage seriously in the debate on universal services, particularly in its refusal to publish longer-term forecasts for spending on universal



services, and calls on the Scottish Government again to publish, as soon as possible, the most accurate available forecasts for spending on universal services in Scotland for each of the next 10 years."

14:58

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):**

Gavin Brown is right when he says clearly that the debate is about choices. All members of the Parliament know that they get elected to it to make choices.

The choice is not between targeted benefits and universalism, because we have a mixture of targeted and universal support—that is clear. However, the SNP wants us to believe that the choice is between my party, the Conservatives and the Labour Party, which are against universalism, and the SNP, which alone is in favour of it. That is patently not the case.

I have a clear example. In England this week, mothers and fathers are investigating whether their two-year-old children will be eligible for free nursery education in September. Parents who are out of work and receiving benefits will be able to apply, and it could change those kids' life chances. The service is not universal—it is targeted—but it is a good thing to have. Everyone seems to welcome that, apart from the SNP, despite the Liberal Democrats laying out costed plans.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**Willie Rennie:** Not just now.

The SNP has made the choice that I described. I criticise the SNP for it and I do not believe that it is rejecting the plans because of some golden principle. The SNP seems to believe that universalism is a golden principle. However, let us look at what the SNP Government is doing right now. It is charging for essential dental treatment. This morning, I looked at some of the charges that are being made. Check-ups are free, but root canal treatment is £37 and a single crown is £68. That is basic dental care and the NHS is charging for it—it is not universally free.

Eye treatment is exactly the same. Along with the Liberal Democrats, Ken Macintosh was a member of the Government that introduced free eye tests, but treatment, glasses and contact lenses are all charged for, so they are not free and universal services. However, I do not hear the SNP describing them as a tax on short-sighted people or a tax on teeth. Why do we not hear that claim?

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**Willie Rennie:** Not just now.

In John Swinney's area, Perth and Kinross Council charges for services that I regard as

essential, such as home care. It charges £11.47 per hour for home care. The support is targeted; those who have the means pay and those who do not have the means can get support. The service that is provided is not universal—it is targeted—and those who can afford to pay should pay. That is a good thing, but it means that the service is not universal, and I do not hear the SNP condemning that. The golden principle of universalism does not apply right across the board, so for the SNP to claim that only it can defend universalism, when it charges for many essential services, is false and denies reality.

The social contract or social wage is just some kind of fabricated construct. It is a cover for a cobbled-together set of policies that the SNP believes will appeal. I believe that they will appeal but, when we face so many challenges in the world, is it right to force the debate into such a false construct as universal good, targeted bad? That ignores reality.

Beyond getting the economy back on track, this country faces the three big sustainability challenges of poverty, age and the environment. We need to focus our attention on those challenges and others—I am sure that other people have other priorities. We need to focus on the return that we get for the investment that we make, rather than believe that universalism is a good thing and that everything else is bad.

The working population is not growing as fast as we need it to grow to cope with the ageing population. The poverty in some communities is so entrenched that people in those communities will be destined to remain in poverty unless we break the cycle. We have already missed the first set of climate change targets and we cannot afford to miss more of them in the future. That is another priority for the Government.

I accept that freezing the council tax is a good thing in good times, but it does not really address climate change, the demographic challenge or poverty. That is why Gavin Brown is absolutely right when he says that we need 10-year projections so that we can look into the future to see the sustainability of the policies and review them individually and collectively, so that they stay sustainable and continue to address the big challenges that we face on age, climate change and poverty. If we do not address those issues and if we do not look for a sustainable budget rather than a budget for the independence referendum, we will let Parliament and the country down.

I move amendment S4M-06225.1, to leave out from "confirms" to end and insert:

"recognises the progress being made on cutting the deficit and placing the public finances on a sustainable footing; welcomes help for households in the UK budget,

including the biggest ever rise in the income tax threshold, taking 186,000 Scots out of income tax altogether and cutting it by £600 for over two million more, and help with childcare costs for around 210,000 families in Scotland; further recognises the fiscal and demographic challenges facing governments and parliaments across the world and the importance of public service reform; believes that a multi-dimensional approach is required whereby the wider social, economic and environmental benefits from spending on universal services are always taken into account in decision-making, and supports the extension of free childcare to two-year-olds in Scotland to match proposals in the rest of the UK."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We turn to the open debate. I ask for speeches of six minutes, please. We have very little time in hand for interventions.

15:05

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** The Scottish Government provides universal benefits and a decent living wage because we know that social justice, social cohesion and economic success depend on treating people fairly. My colleagues in the Welfare Reform Committee received some very interesting research this week. The study, which was undertaken by the centre for regional economic and social research at Sheffield Hallam University, warns that welfare reforms alone will take more than £1.6 billion a year out of the Scottish economy. That equates to about £480 a year for every adult of working age in Scotland. In Glasgow, the amount rises to £650 a year.

Down south, in the Cameron counties such as Hampshire, Berkshire and Cambridgeshire, people will not feel the same pinch. The impact there will be less than £200 a year—hardly a testament to fairness. What happened to the idea of closing the gap between the rich and the poor?

**Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab):** Will the member confirm that the report showed that the impact on the economy in the more prosperous parts of Scotland will be comparable to that in prosperous areas in England and that the report exposes not a geographical split between Scotland and England but a split between those who are in the deprived areas of the UK and those who are in the more prosperous areas?

**Christina McKelvie:** As Alex Neil has just said, we didnae vote for that—absolutely.

It is really interesting to listen to the Labour Party in the debate—it would rather come to this chamber and come out with such nonsense than fight austerity. Perhaps that is because its shadow minister, Liam Byrne, said recently that if Labour wins in 2015, it will not reverse austerity. He said:

"I'm afraid that as part of Ed's zero-based spending review"—

what does "zero-based spending review" mean? Zero for pensioners, zero for students, zero for the vulnerable, zero for the sick and zero for the unemployed. That is what Labour has to offer Scotland—zero.

What happened to the concept of lifting more and more children out of poverty? What happened to the belief in a fairer and more equal society? The concept of universality is the keystone of equality. To paraphrase George Orwell's famous statement from "Animal Farm", all men are created equal but some are more equal than others, while women are much more unequal.

We live under an illusion that somehow the glass ceiling has been smashed and that women are treated equally, but that is not the reality for women in Scotland. They are significantly lower paid than their male peers. In spite of equality legislation, they are still paid about 11.9 per cent less than men who are doing the same job. The Government is working hard to close that gap, but many of the reasons for it are beyond our reach as yet.

It is women who take most of the responsibility for children, and most single-parent families are led by women, so it is no surprise that women are more likely than men to be living in poverty. Poverty is about much more than a lack of income; it is about a lack of opportunity. Evidence shows that growing up in poverty can have a profound and lasting impact on children's outcomes. We have worked hard in Scotland to lift more children out of poverty. Now the Cameron coalition, supported by its better together buddies, wants to reverse that success.

By withdrawing universal benefits such as child benefit—the one payment that a mother could count on getting herself—Westminster is consciously undermining the future for a generation of children born into poorer families and those guys in Labour remain silent on it. We cannot continue to be powerless over decisions that concern the most disadvantaged people in our society. It is only independence that will allow us to make the best judgments, in Scotland, for the people of Scotland.

Constituents are lining up at my door. Each one has a unique story to tell; each one is suffering because of decisions made by consecutive Governments at Westminster that have completely failed to understand the Scottish environment. Universality lies at the centre of equality. Introducing hierarchies of means testing and discretionary rules about a spare bedroom just reinforces that great divide. Who suffers most? The already disadvantaged—the lone parents, the children, the elderly, those who cannot find work, the chronically ill and the disabled. David Cameron says that he wants to make work pay, but he is

even attacking those who work with the support of the disability living allowance.

In the areas that we control, the Scottish Government has put equality right at the heart of its agenda. We provide healthcare that is free at the point of delivery and is not threatened by continuing privatisation—it is also delivering a consistently better service to everyone in Scotland in comparison with the service provided elsewhere in the UK—because we control that budget. We have universal free prescriptions, because we know that such services help to keep people out of hospital. The Scottish Government does not expect people to pay for being ill. We have free eye tests and free dental checks for children, because we see the value of early intervention and because we have control of that budget.

We also have free education and no tuition fees at university, because we control that budget. We have frozen council tax and made up the 10 per cent reduction in council tax benefit that David Cameron introduced, because we control that budget. We believe that older people should be treated with dignity and respect and enabled to enjoy an independent old age. That is why we support universal free personal care for the elderly and free bus passes for them. Universal services should be not a benefit but a right, and equal treatment should be given to all by all.

Only with a yes vote will we open up those choices. That will allow the people of Scotland to create a fairer society. I look forward to the day when we create that fairer society—that just Scotland—that we know is intrinsic to our values, which are Scottish values. I support the motion in the cabinet secretary's name.

15:11

**Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):**  
Presiding Officer,

"We have improved social services ... we are building hospitals. We are opening new schools (I remember they used to blame me for keeping back the schools to make way for new houses. It wasn't true even then; and it certainly isn't true now. On average every week in this country ten new schools are opened.) ... Our general economic prospects are good ... Indeed, let us be frank about it. Most of our people have never had it so good."

Most members will realise that the person whom I have just quoted is Harold Macmillan, but they would be forgiven for thinking that it was John Swinney, such is the similarity of words used when discussing the provision of public services. Mr Swinney would like us to believe that things are great in communities across Scotland, that our education services are not crumbling under the pressure of a lack of resources, that our health service is not collapsing under the strain of financial constraint and that we can continue to

fund everything for everyone. Those of us in the real world know that that is not the case. We also know that, when Mr Swinney is being honest with himself and with his Cabinet colleagues, he knows that, too.

During recess, I reflected on the subject of the debate and on what universal services mean to me. Each time that my thoughts have turned to the debate, I have been struck by how negative they are: "something for nothing", "cuts commission" and "bitter together" are the words that come to mind first. Of course, those are not my words or ideas that I would associate myself with; those are the words that SNP members use to try to control the debate. Instead of stepping up to the challenge and working constructively to come up with an answer on how we fund universal services, the Scottish Government would rather use those negative words and phrases as a human shield to deflect attention from the real issues that are affecting people across the country.

We all know that the current levels of public spending are unsustainable, yet the Scottish Government does nothing to help to alleviate the problem. During a recent Finance Committee meeting, John Swinney said:

"There is no lack of political leadership; the Government could not be clearer about its view on how we should proceed."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 9 January 2013; c 2023.]

However, everyone is still looking to him for the answer. If there was true political leadership on the issue, he would have come to the chamber today and told us how the Scottish Government will continue to fund universal services. We know that the current levels of public spending are unsustainable and that our country cannot afford to fund every service for everyone without raising money through increased taxation, yet the Scottish Government continues to spend money without being honest about the consequences. That is not showing political leadership.

Let me be clear that I do not wish to take travel entitlement away from disabled people; I do not want to introduce £9,000-worth of tuition fees for students; I do not want to increase council tax by 30 per cent; and I do not want people paying to use their local hospital. I cannot be clearer about that.

However, I also do not want someone with a brain injury or epilepsy losing her entitlement to have a companion travel card because she has been told that there is not enough money to go around. I know that there is enough money to go around; it is just that the wrong decisions are being made about the money that is available.

I do not want another local bus service to be lost because of a lack of investment in that sector.

Since March 2011, 136 bus services in Scotland have been lost. That means that those who rely on public transport are having to do without. That is not the society that I want to live in. There is nothing fair about that. Those are just two examples of the consequences if we do not address the issues of public spending.

I have heard many times in the chamber that the SNP has wiped out student debt for Scottish students. It always puzzles me when such statements are made. I graduated in 2006 and, as a result, I pay the graduate endowment fee. I do not begrudge paying that, so it does not annoy me that my student debt has not been wiped out. However, it annoys me that SNP members say that they have wiped out all student debt, when of course that is not the case.

It annoys me that the Scottish Government has done nothing to address the student loan system. As most members will know, student loans are awarded to students on the basis of their parents' or guardians' income, not the student's income. That does not take into account the number of dependants that a parent or guardian may have, whether the student has a part-time job or the distance that a student has to travel. It would have been a far better idea to address student finance than to grandstand on the issue of wiping out student debt for a select few—there is nothing fair about that.

There is also nothing fair about parents opting to pay for their child to go to nursery school, primary school and secondary school and expecting the average taxpayer to pay for that same child to go to university. The Government has done nothing to address that; instead, it wipes out the parents' financial obligations, too.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**Siobhan McMahon:** There is nothing fair about a council tax freeze. It is not fair that I have had my council tax frozen for yet another year, when I can afford to pay more. I could contribute to ensuring that vital local services continue, but of course my local authority was not given that option.

**Mark McDonald:** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** The member is not giving way.

**Siobhan McMahon:** It is wrong that local authorities have their revenue-generating power stripped from them year on year and then get the blame for reduced services. It is time that the Scottish Government owned up to its role in that.

Professor David Bell recently stated that, if Scottish local authorities increased council tax at the same rate as those in England, they would generate an additional £300 million,

approximately, by 2016-17. To maintain the council tax freeze, the Scottish Government will have to increase its compensation to local authorities for the lost income. In turn, that will increase local authorities' dependency on Scottish Government funding.

I do not believe that that is political leadership in action—in fact, it is the complete opposite. I cannot support the Scottish Government paying £70 million of taxpayers' money to local authorities to ensure a council tax freeze, when the money would be better spent on addressing the problems of the bedroom tax in our communities. However, the political leadership on show from the Scottish Government will of course not allow that.

I hope that the Scottish Government will now look seriously and urgently at public spending on universal services and take on board Labour members' genuine concerns about the matter.

15:19

**Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** I want to look at taxation in the UK and make a direct link to universal services. The current UK Government has courted much controversy by reducing the highest rate of income tax from 50 per cent to 45 per cent, which will benefit any UK taxpayer who earns more than £150,000 a year, while those earning more than £32,000 a year will pay 40 per cent tax on their income. Only two years ago, the 40 per cent level was paid by those earning more than £35,000 a year. As we know, as of next year, the 20 per cent basic tax rate will begin at £10,000. All those taxpayers, as well as those who pay tax via measures such as VAT and various business taxes, pay for all the services on which the state decides to spend money—we should be clear on that.

Irrespective of how it gets to Scotland via the block grant of £30 billion, £12 billion is spent in Scotland on the NHS. Of that £12 billion, just £50 million is spent on ensuring that all in our society are given free prescriptions. I use the word "free" advisedly: as we know, of course, prescriptions are not free, because the tax collected by society pays for them. What of the classroom teacher in Scotland on between £21,400 and £34,000 a year, whose income is taxed at either 20 per cent or 40 per cent? Do they not pay through taxation for prescriptions? What about MSPs, who are on £57,000 a year? Do we not already pay for prescriptions in some way via general levels of taxation? If people want to have a debate about general levels of taxation, they should do so. I do not believe that taxation can be conflated with fundamental universal service provision, although I think that many in the chamber are in danger of doing that.

Why do we insist that a teacher or a nurse—

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Bob Doris:** I will develop my point first.

Why do we insist that a teacher, a nurse, a firefighter, a police officer or, indeed, an MSP should pay more towards the NHS when they are ill than they pay when they are healthy? They already pay towards the NHS as a duty because they pay taxes. To me, that is a fundamental point, and it is why I believe that free prescriptions—again, I use the word “free” advisedly—are important in a civilised, modern society in which the NHS and medical provision should be free to everyone at the point of need.

**Gavin Brown:** Will the member give way?

**Bob Doris:** I will give way to Drew Smith.

**Drew Smith:** I am grateful to the member for giving way. He is right, and it is interesting to have that debate about the level of taxation. I recall that, when he was on a panel talking about poverty in Glasgow not long ago, he said that he would prefer taxation to rise. How does that square with the cabinet secretary's position, which I understand is that, in an independent Scotland, corporation tax would fall and personal taxation would not rise?

**Bob Doris:** On corporation tax, the cabinet secretary has made it clear that the strategy will be to increase the overall cake. As for sustainability, we have had police reform, fire reform, pay constraint and preventative spend for the long term, while the most recent “Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland” figures show a £4 billion relative surplus. All of that, plus the fact that, in each of the past 30 years, we have collected more per person in tax than anywhere else in the UK shows that sustainability is possible.

Let us look at prescription charges in more detail. They were abolished by an SNP Government and benefit in particular 600,000 Scots whose income is below £16,000 a year. Abolishing prescription charges therefore helped the most vulnerable in society.

I will talk a little bit about the concessionary travel scheme. Just as Labour members have said that they are keen to reintroduce prescription charges, they have said that they want to pick away at the universal concessionary travel scheme and take bus passes off some over-60s, although they will not say whom. For many, the scheme is a lifeline in relation to not only balancing household budgets but preventing social isolation. What about the well-off pensioner? The argument has been made many times in the chamber that they should not get a free bus pass,

but have pensioners not paid taxes throughout their lives? Also, any pensioner who does not use the bus pass will not cost the state a penny—that is important as well. I do not want to live in a society in which the absolute poorest get free medicine at the point of need but no one else does. I do not want to live in a society that divides our pensioners into the haves and the have-nots. That is corrosive and, ultimately, it undermines the social provision of services.

That is the real point that I want members to take from my speech. I do not want people in Scotland to pay taxes to the state and get little in return, as they might see it. Universal service provision benefits all in society and is a social contract between Government and communities. I say to Mr Rennie that that is not a new concept. The idea of no taxation without representation was not invented by the SNP, but there we are—we will take credit for that as well, if he wants. If we really want a society in which Scottish people, by and large, feel that it is a duty to pay tax for service provision not just for the weakest in society but for everyone, we must preserve certain core universal services that are paid for by all via general taxation. That is the core of the debate, and history will show that the SNP and the Scottish Government are on the correct side of the debate.

15:23

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I listened to the cabinet secretary with genuine interest—as I always do—because I wanted to know what the debate was really all about. However, we have heard much of what we heard today from the cabinet secretary many times over in previous budget debates. My initial view was that the title of the debate, “Universal Services”, might give a clue as to the reason for having the debate, but the Scottish Government seems to be trying to use the issue of universal services as a key weapon in the referendum battle. Not to put too fine a point on it, the Government is using universal services as a simple political football. That is regrettable because we need a proper debate about universal services, which Christie and the independent budget review urged us to have. The cabinet secretary was pleased to quote from those reports when it suited his purposes, but he has conveniently forgotten that aspect of their recommendations.

I agreed with a great deal of what the cabinet secretary said. I also agreed with a great deal of what Christina McKelvie said, as I often do. However, I gently point out to her that the bulk of the problems that are being caused by the UK Government in increasing poverty are not to do

with the withdrawal of universal benefits—many of which, particularly for pensioners, are being maintained—but relate to the withdrawal of targeted benefits. We should think of the reductions in tax credits or the housing benefit changes. It is regrettable that the cabinet secretary did not see fit even to mention in his speech the bedroom tax, for example, as that is obviously one of the key issues in Scotland currently. Perhaps the Scottish Government could turn its attention to a targeted approach to that in terms of support for councils and housing associations that are losing money as a result of that tax.

The reality is that the debate is not about universal versus targeted benefits; it is about both. We have always used both. The Scottish Government knows that, and a lot of the debate is about where we draw the line between the two.

The childcare example that Willie Rennie gave was very interesting. If we think about it, we will see that he was adopting a far more universal approach, although not a totally universal approach, to childcare than is the Scottish Government, which is taking a very targeted approach to the under-threes. I am not criticising that approach by the Scottish Government, because that may well be the most effective way to deal with the early years in the current financial circumstances; I am merely pointing out that the Scottish Government adopts a targeted approach in many policies, and we must accept that it is totally simplistic and misleading to say that the debate is about universal services that the Scottish Government supports and other, non-universal, targeted services that, by implication, other parties support.

Throughout my life in Parliament, I have tended to support a more universal approach to childcare services on the Scandinavian model, but I thought that it was really interesting that Alex Salmond came out with that particular view at the SNP conference a few weeks ago. His speech then suggested something that was quite interesting to me. He said, "Well, we could have those universal services if we had independence." That view provides a lot of the mood music to and sub-plot of the debate. Indeed, I seem to recall that, at an earlier SNP conference, Alex Salmond said that the only way to protect universal services is to vote for independence. I think that that is the real reason why we are having this debate again. We have debated the matter on more than one occasion recently.

**Mark McDonald:** I appreciate that Mr Chisholm says that he and his colleagues want an open and honest debate. The Scottish Government is setting out its position in the debate by saying, "These are the services that we believe are key and which we should fund." Would not the debate be open and

honest if we got some indication from Mr Chisholm and his colleagues about which of those services they support—or do not support—and what they would do differently?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** It is absolutely right that the Scottish Labour Party should take time to look at those issues and their complexities, and relate them to the financial situation. It is unreal to pretend that somehow we can have this debate without considering the financial situation. That is the whole problem with the SNP's approach, of course. It can present a distorted, simplistic and rosy picture of the economics of independence, and it is very easy for it to say that universal childcare and, indeed, any other universal service that it cares to mention will be possible under independence. It is very difficult, as those are complex arguments—

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member give way?

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I will do so, if I have time, but I have only one more minute. Actually, I had better give way now, or I will not be allowed to do so.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I appreciate that the member considers that the debate is entirely about independence, but he says that his party should take time to consider its position on the issues. We are aware that his party's commission will not report until after the referendum. Is that a mere coincidence?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give Malcolm Chisholm some time back.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** My understanding is that it will report long before that.

We must have a serious debate. It is perfectly reasonable to ask whether a universal service such as concessionary travel should be modified. I am not aware of anybody who says that concessionary travel should be abolished. If even Age Scotland says that it should start at 65, surely the SNP can at least look at that view and not dismiss it as somehow a targeted betrayal.

It is also right to acknowledge that there has always been a difference between never-to-be-questioned universal services such as the NHS and some more recent additions. I have some personal responsibility for one of those additions—free personal care—so I am obviously attached to it, but I do not take the view that whether it should be modified in a particular way should not be looked at.

It is absolutely imperative that we have a serious debate, take universal services out of the referendum battle, and give the matter the proper and undivided attention that it deserves.

15:29

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I want to provide some clarity on the spending on benefits in the UK by the Department for Work and Pensions. The total benefits bill for 2011-12 was £166.98 billion, 47 per cent of which—£74.22 billion—was spent on the state pension, as opposed to pension credit. To me, the state pension is an entitlement, not a benefit. It is something that pensioners such as me have contributed to throughout our working lives. Therefore, the perception about the benefits bill—to which George Osborne's rather obscene language of the shirkers against the workers relates—is very wrong. Much of the rest of the DWP's benefits bill goes on people who are in work but on low pay. Let us set that to the side.

Let us also set to the side the idea that pensioners are somehow just a burden; I say that as someone who is herself a demographic challenge. Not all pensioners are sitting at home with their carpet slippers on, crocheting—I am talking about the men when I say that, of course. Not all pensioners are a problem. They range in age from 60 right up to 100. Pensioners provide free childcare to families, which enables people to go out to work. They are carers for their own elderly parents, which saves the state money. Pensioners who work in B & Q, Tesco or Asda pay taxes, as well as having the time to help us to buy the right things and not to rush our purchases along the conveyor belt, which is always a plus. Pensioners man voluntary sector desks and shops and carry voluntary sector collection tins, all of which contributes to society. Therefore, I do not want to hear any more expressions of the idea that pensioners are a burden. Many pensioners are a huge asset, in what they give to society and in what they provide financially.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The member makes a very important point. Pensioners contribute strongly to society. However, does she accept that, as the Christie commission and the Beveridge report said, it is the size of the percentage increase in the dependent population that is the problem?

**Christine Grahame:** I am coming to that. That case can be made, but I wanted to bring some balance to the debate. I feel that because so many members are so young, they had the wrong idea about my generation and older generations in general.

The most important thing for the Government to do is to set about achieving solidarity and cohesion—that is the Government's jargon; I thought for a minute that Tommy Sheridan was coming back, but “solidarity and cohesion” is not the name of a new political party. The purpose of

the solidarity policy is to increase the overall income of those in the lower income groups in particular, and the purpose of the cohesion policy is to get rid of the postcode lottery of poverty. In my view, means testing does not help with that, either in principle or in practice. With means testing, there will always be winners and there will certainly be losers.

I support the provision of free prescriptions on a universal basis because of the evidence. I was the convener of the Health and Sport Committee when the policy was being considered. We received evidence that more than 95 per cent of people were already not paying for prescriptions, which meant that only a small proportion of people were paying for them. There was an exemption list of illnesses and diseases, whereby people who had those conditions did not have to pay for their prescriptions. We asked the professionals how we could make the exemption list fairer, but doing so was not possible: as soon as a condition was added to it, another one came along. It was the professionals who told us that we should just get rid of prescription charges. The system was unfair and its administration was costly and not worth doing. For the rich person who probably pays for special treatment anyway, free prescriptions do not matter; they can put the money somewhere else. The reality is that it was not worth keeping the prescription charging system going, for the reasons that I have given.

I also support the provision of the concessionary bus pass on a universal basis. If we changed that, there would be winners and losers.

**Gavin Brown:** Will Christine Grahame take an intervention?

**Christine Grahame:** I would just like to finish my point. I will allow the member to intervene when I get to the end of my section on the bus pass.

As others have said, the bus pass is keeping people active socially, physically and psychologically. General practitioners have indicated that there have been huge health improvements among people who can now travel about. Some of them might not be able to afford to heat their houses, so they get on the Edinburgh to Peebles bus, take a wee visit, keep warm, get a cup of tea and come home. The bus pass is a great plus in their lives.

It is possible for the rich to take a self-denying ordinance—they can decide to pay for their bus travel or to put their money in a charity tin. In my view, that is a far simpler way of dealing with the issue than trying to means test people, whose means might change over time. How often would people's means be reviewed?

**Jamie Hepburn:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Christine Grahame:** I will when I finish my point.

There is merit in what Malcolm Chisholm says about matching that issue to the changes in the retirement age because, as the increase in the UK retirement age comes through, it may be appropriate not to take from people who have, but to sequence that in over time. It seems to me that pensioners would agree that that was just.

I cannot remember which member wanted in. Do they still want in?

**Jamie Hepburn:** Christine Grahame talked about a self-denying ordinance. Does she recommend to Siobhan McMahon that she operate a similar system? She talked about being able to afford to pay more council tax. Should she perhaps be writing an additional cheque to her local authority?

**Christine Grahame:** I am not going to personalise my speech. I know that members will contribute to various charities in different ways. That is something that can be done.

I want to refer quickly to free personal care in my last minutes. Free personal care removes a huge amount of stress from people. Are we seriously saying that 77,000 vulnerable elderly people should not have assistance for personal care? *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Christine Grahame:** If Siobhan McMahon and Jamie Hepburn are going to have an argument, they should take it outside.

In fact, Age UK has shown that it costs £5,000 to keep somebody at home with care, while it costs £25,000 to put them into a care home.

When we introduced the policy—it is one of the best things that the Parliament has done—we lost the attendance allowance. I was here at the time and I remember Henry McLeish and various members on the Labour benches trying to get that allowance back. I have discovered that between 2002 and 2011 we lost £270 million. That money has been retained by the DWP. If we are talking about justice, that money should have come back to Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask members not to debate with each other across the chamber.

15:37

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I start by taking us back to Jimmy Reid's 1972 inauguration speech as rector of the University of Glasgow, which was described by the

New York Times as the greatest speech since the Gettysburg address.

Jimmy's speech was entitled "Alienation". It described a society whose prevailing sense of values caused people to become alienated from humanity. He said that to be partially dehumanised made people insensitive and ruthless in their handling of their fellow citizens, becoming self-centred and grasping individuals. He talked about a rat race, with people scurrying around and trampling on others in the pursuit of personal success. He pleaded with the students of the time to reject that approach as it led to the loss of dignity and human spirit. He said that it was a tragedy that the great mass of people go through their lives without a glimmer of what they might have contributed to their fellow human beings. However, through education, the flowering of individual talents was the precondition for everyone's development.

Today, we are seeing a new version of alienation when we see people who need the help of their fellow man being demonised by some sections in our society. Essentially, that is a big part of what the debate is about—the kind of society that we want and a choice of futures.

There is nothing in the Opposition amendments that we can rally round and offer up as an exciting alternative package to the Scottish people. Labour's amendment is a threat to abolish universal services, thinly disguised as a concern about sustainability; through their amendment, the Tories want a 10 or even 20-year budget forecast; and the Liberal amendment simply welcomes the Tory UK Government's budget, which it signed up to. The amendments are all depressing, given their lack of vision for Scotland.

Should we go along with the divisive means testing and the "something-for-nothing brigade"—in the words of Johann Lamont, not the SNP—or do we face that down and deliver a better future for our people?

The four pillars behind our public service reforms—prevention, performance, people and partnerships—are key drivers in delivering the outcomes that the Scottish people want. They help us to intervene early, to prevent problems from occurring and, ultimately, to offer better value. They have enabled us to focus on performance improvement in our police and fire services and to establish close partnerships among councils in respect of the integration of health and social care.

The Scottish Government is delivering a better future for the people of Scotland. We do not charge our university students for their tuition fees; we do not charge the sick for their prescriptions; we do not charge our elderly citizens in relation to their personal care needs; we do not charge



people for eye tests; and we do not charge senior citizens for their bus travel.

Those five universal services are not the mark of a profligate Government that is reckless with public finances. Even with those commitments, the figures show that in each of the past five years public spending in Scotland as a percentage share of our economy has been less than in the UK—by some £4 billion. The share in Scotland is even lower than it is in the majority of our European Union partners. Those services, which are affordable and are fully paid for, are the mark of a Government that recognises, as the Reid Foundation does, that the principle of universality is one of the Parliament's greatest achievements.

Each year, more than 100,000 students in Scotland benefit from our decision not to charge tuition fees. Student debt levels are by far the lowest in the UK. We abolished Labour's endowment fees, and students from the poorest backgrounds get a minimum income of more than £7,000. That is not something for nothing; it is investment, to enable individual talents to flourish, for everyone's benefit.

**Ken Macintosh:** Can Mr Coffey explain why, on headcount, the number of students in further education has dropped from just under 500,000 in 2007 to 320,000 today?

**Willie Coffey:** Of course it has not done. I think that Jimmy Reid would be hard pushed to determine who the Tories are in this Parliament these days.

**Ken Macintosh:** Those are Scottish Government figures.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Willie Coffey:** We know that in Scotland 600,000 adults who earned less than £16,000 per year used not to be entitled to free prescriptions. Studies in 2008 in 15 high-income countries that had prescription charges showed that the approach led patients to forgo essential medicines, which had an impact on their health and led to higher care costs. Free prescriptions are not something for nothing.

Jimmy Reid urged students at the University of Glasgow to reject attitudes that might set one group against another. He urged them to reaffirm their faith in humanity and unashamedly acknowledge that, as Burns put it,

"man is good by nature".

He stated his belief that his generation was taking mankind along a path towards a goal that is worth fighting for.

Just over 40 years later, the vision for Scotland that the Scottish Government has set out embraces the goals that Jimmy Reid expressed so

wonderfully in his speech. I, too, think that those goals are worth fighting for, and I look forward to continuing the process in an independent Scotland.

15:43

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** It is good to have a debate on universal services. I understand that the debate has added impetus because of the referendum debate, but I think that it is an important debate in any context, because it ought to be about long-term thinking, with no hint of political opportunism. It is a debate about which services the state should and should not be responsible for and the extent of the burden that we expect our taxpayers to bear.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the importance of the Christie commission in making him think about the longer term. That is absolutely true. Christie, along with the Beveridge report and the business and civic communities across Scotland, in all their utterances, warned persistently that the current universal benefit payments are not sustainable unless we increase the overall tax receipts in Scotland or significantly reduce other areas of public spending. Of course, all that comes at a time when there is debate about the size of Scotland's public sector.

It would be very nice to live in—and all of us would sign up to—a utopia where everything was free. I am sure that we would all love to be part of a Government whose beneficence stretched ahead indefinitely to provide us all with free bus passes, free prescriptions, free university education or whatever. However, under the current circumstances that is simply not responsible government and the debate needs to take on a moral and philosophical dimension that pays heed to the meaning of social justice, equality of opportunity and public responsibility.

**The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay):** Given her moral and philosophical outlook, would the member like to give us her view on the UK Government's reduction of tax for the richest at a time when other Governments are having to make very challenging decisions?

**Liz Smith:** I absolutely would. That is all part of the balance that is required. There is a moral perspective to the issue because although it is about the welfare state's founding principles, those principles have to be set against what provides an incentive for individuals and families and the incentive to work. Such matters are controversial. Indeed, we know as much from the current controversy, which is by no means the first controversy on the issue.

In that regard, the speeches made by Malcolm Chisholm and Willie Rennie are very important. The debate is all about choices and the value judgments that we have to make. Our responses to such matters will be different, but it is not right to say that those choices do not exist—they definitely do.

The economic challenge is one of allocative efficiency; in other words, is the economy getting the best out of very scarce resources set against the usual arguments about Pareto optimality and the goods that we ought to have? These issues trouble politicians as much as they fascinate economists, but there is no doubt that they come more into play when the percentage share of the dependent population is rising. I totally accept Christine Grahame's comments about the very positive contribution that older people can make, but that contribution must be set against the statistics that Gavin Brown highlighted in his speech, and a major decision has to be made on that basis.

As far as Conservatives are concerned, a balance has to be struck. In our book, universal benefits can be argued for only if there is overriding and definitive proof that, by making them universal, all individuals, society and the economy in general are better off. For example, we believe the provision of health visitors to be a universal benefit. We made that clear in our budget recommendations, and our arguments in that respect were accepted by Parliament just a few months ago. I think that Parliament voted that way because of the overriding and definitive proof that spending at that level provides youngsters, irrespective of who they are, with a universal benefit.

**Christine Grahame:** I will be very brief. Does the member accept that the concessionary travel scheme greatly prevents deterioration in elderly people in all kinds of ways and that, because of their great use of the scheme, it should be retained?

**Liz Smith:** Yes—for some. However, as I think Willie Rennie made clear, the debate about universal payments should not be a yes-or-no matter. I go back to my point that we need to take the best possible line on our economic resources. I believe that there are choices to be made. We differ from other parties in the chamber—for example, on higher education—because we believe that there are private as well as public benefits to be gained. In the debate about free school meals, most of which I believe took place in 2008, our position was that although somewhere in the region of 118,000 extra children were going to benefit from that policy, many of them would have benefited from it in any case and the money would have been better spent in other areas. As a

result, we have to be careful about saying that universal payments are a case of either/or. There is a measured debate to be had on the matter.

In this very important debate, it is, as Mr Brown suggested, incumbent on all of us to set out not only our policies but how we would cost them and, more important, where the money would come from. I support Mr Brown's amendment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I must tell members that unfortunately we have run out of spare time, so from now on interventions will have to be accommodated within their six minutes.

15:49

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** This debate is about what kind of society we want to have, what our values are and where we want our welfare system to be. There is no doubt that Scotland wants a welfare system that is built on the principle of universalism: from each according to their ability and to each according to their need, and from the cradle to the grave. Scotland has consistently voted for that.

I have spoken before in this chamber about universalism and I make no apologies for returning to some of the points I raised then. In response to Johann Lamont's speech in which she introduced the concept of the something-for-nothing society, the Jimmy Reid Foundation published a report on the case for universalism. On 4 December I lodged a motion, in the hope of a debate at that time. Not surprisingly, members of the parties that lodged amendments to John Swinney's motion today did not sign up to my motion, so we were unable to have that debate.

My motion noted that the Jimmy Reid Foundation report looked at the evidence of the impact of universal public services and that its overriding conclusion was that the group that will be most affected if universalism is rolled back is poor people. The report also stated that the move from universal to targeted services creates

"stigma, reduces take-up rates"—

we can see that in the case of the elderly—

"causes enormous increases in administrative costs and ... leads to less public support for those services"—

in terms of their quality and the need for them in society—

"which in turn leads to significant decline in the quality of those services".

It is a really important report on the case for universalism.

I remind members of Scotland's Futures Forum event that was held in this chamber on 29 May

2009. It looked at reducing inequality in our society. One of its key conclusions was:

"Inequalities of income and wealth have changed little in recent decades with a corrosive effect on all sections of society. It is therefore vital that we tackle inequality as much as poverty."

Whether we look to books such as "The Spirit Level" or other evidence, there is absolutely no doubt that societies that are less unequal—not forgetting that we are the most unequal society in Europe and the fourth most unequal in the world—fare far better. We often make comparisons with the Nordic countries, and there is no doubt that individually and collectively they occupy the highest ranks and indices of income, wealth, happiness, life satisfaction and equality, with the lowest levels of poverty and inequality. Those societies are based on the fundamental principles of universal welfare, which are hugely important.

I will develop that argument a little by quoting from this month's *New Scientist*, the editorial of which talks about the true cost of cuts. Gavin Brown asked John Swinney for a 10-year projection of the cost of universal benefits. As a member of the Conservative Party—the party that is introducing austerity—he might want to consider when it will give us figures on the true cost of austerity. The editorial says:

"the immediate consequences of austerity may give way to more enduring and insidious effects on health. It is plausible that protracted economic hardship will lead to increases in heart attacks, strokes and depression. Stress hormones are known to trigger or exacerbate these conditions, and it is hard to argue that those worrying about the security of their jobs, homes, families and finances are not experiencing high levels of stress."

The *New Scientist* goes on to say that the

"effects on health, on the other hand, have gone largely undiscussed".

The assumption is that when austerity ends and the belt tightening goes away those health problems will not still exist, but people affected by those problems will undergo a genetic transformation. Sometimes there is even a genetic influence on babies before they are born, while they are in the womb, because of stress hormones in their mothers at times of austerity.

Another article in *New Scientist*, "Austerity's toxic genetic legacy", refers to *The Lancet*. It says:

"The more immediate health impacts of economic cuts were documented last month in *The Lancet* ... revealing that suicides in Europe have soared since the financial crash in 2008, with 1000 extra deaths in England alone by 2010. Likewise, the incidence of mental health disorders has increased in countries worst hit by debt crises, such as Greece and Spain."

The article also has a quote from David Stuckler from the University of Oxford—I bring in the Nordic comparison again. He says:

"the paths chosen by Iceland, Finland and Sweden may demonstrate a healthier way of dealing with an economic crisis. Unlike many other countries, their governments decided to let the banks fail, post-2008, rather than bailing them out. They then nationalised all of them, restricting the banks' risky investment activities. They also retained all health and welfare budgets, as opposed to cutting them back, and introduced schemes to retrain and redeploy sacked workers. Those measures insulated the population from many of the stresses of austerity, possibly explaining why rates of suicide and mental health problems have not risen."

There is absolutely no doubt that this debate is about choices—but the choices can be made better for Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members to keep to six minutes.

15:55

**James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab):** I was interested in the cabinet secretary's reluctance to engage in 10-year projections. It might be surprising to many that such an experienced politician does not want all the data before him in order to assess the potential policy options going forward. However, if we look at the landscape that faces Mr Swinney and the Scottish Government, we see £3 billion of cuts coming down the line from the UK Government in the next four years. The Christie commission tells us that it will be 16 years, from 2010, before expenditure returns to 2010 levels. In addition, by 2031 there will have been an increase of 62 per cent in the number of people aged 65 and over. All those factors mean that there will be a real-terms increase in the cost of providing public services.

Mr Swinney is aware of those facts. He may acknowledge them in private but not in public. Perhaps what makes him uneasy about that is the upcoming independence referendum. We know that he is uneasy because the famous Swinney dossier—the declaration of St Andrews house—told us that the Scottish budget would be more volatile under independence, that an independent Scotland would start life saddled with debt—

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** What is UK debt?

**James Kelly:** It is interesting that Mr Stevenson should say that, but we heard yesterday the fairytale figure—

**Mark McDonald:** Will the member take an intervention?

**James Kelly:** Yes.

**Mark McDonald:** Is it the member's contention that Scotland is currently not saddled with debt as part of the United Kingdom?

**James Kelly:** I was just about to talk about the fairytale debt figures announced yesterday by the Deputy First Minister—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** Order.

**James Kelly:** On you go, Mr Swinney.

**John Swinney:** It would be really important for Mr Kelly to answer Mr McDonald's question. Is Scotland saddled with debt as part of the United Kingdom, yes or no? It is a very simple question, Mr Kelly. Let us hear the answer.

**James Kelly:** The point that I was going to make is that, when Mr Swinney considers the level of debt that we would start with in an independent Scotland, he should not use fairytale figures. He should include the figures involved in the bank bailout in 2008.

**John Swinney:** I think that we will have Mr Kelly on the unionist negotiating team on this one. Does Mr Kelly not realise that the cost of bank bailouts is included in the debt figures of the United Kingdom and in the debt figures that we projected in the publications that we have produced?

**James Kelly:** The point, as Mr Swinney reminds us every year, is that he has only a fixed budget of £30 billion, and it took £57 billion to rescue the Scottish banks alone—more than double the level of the Scottish budget—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, please.

**James Kelly:** How would he have saved those banks in an independent Scotland? That is the answer that the SNP must give to account holders, the thousands of people with mortgages in those banks, and those supported by jobs—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order!

**James Kelly:** It is time that we had some honesty in this debate. We heard Siobhan McMahon quite correctly describing the effects of the cuts in bus services. The fact that subsidised bus miles are now at a 10-year low has resulted in our having 136 fewer bus routes than we had last year.

It is all very well for members such as Christine Grahame to talk up the benefits of the bus pass, but what good does the bus pass do pensioners in Halfway in Cambuslang in my constituency when the bus route that runs through their area is taken off? That is the reality of what is happening on the ground.

It is time for some honest discussion. When are we going to see some honest men and women in the SNP stand up and face the reality? I

sometimes wonder whether, when members like Mr Stevenson go back to their constituency at the weekend, they put on a blindfold so that they do not actually see what is happening on the ground. If Mr Stevenson came to my constituency he would see that there are more than 3,000 children living on or below the poverty line. Many of the 120,000 students who are on the waiting list because they cannot get a college place are in my constituency. It is time for SNP members to open their eyes and face up to the reality.

If we want the public to respect us as a Parliament we need to be honest about what is happening on the ground, we need to be honest about the finances, we need a debate about our priorities and we need to put fairness first.

16:02

**Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):** When I intervened on Mr Kelly to ask what I assumed was a very simple question about whether Scotland is saddled with debt within the UK, I did not anticipate that he would go down the trajectory that he went down. The fact that on one hand Mr Kelly spoke about fairy tales and on the other hand talked about the bank bailouts in the terms that he did demonstrates quite clearly why I will not be taking any lessons from him about the economics of Scotland either in the here and now or under independence.

It was interesting to listen to some of the rhetoric that was used in the debate. Siobhan McMahon said that it was the SNP that brought the term "something for nothing" into the debate. We are indeed using the term "something for nothing". It is what is known in the trade as a direct quotation. It was from Johann Lamont's speech on 25 September in which she said:

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

It was the Labour Party that introduced the term into the debate, so its members should forgive us if we continue to use it to remind people of what the Labour Party thinks universal services are all about.

In some respects, Willie Rennie was correct—I note that he is not here for the rare occasion when somebody says that in the chamber. He said that this debate is about priorities. I accept that it is about priorities. It is about stating what the priorities are within the fixed budget with which the Scottish Government is currently dealing.

I recognise the sincerity with which Willie Rennie pursues the childcare issue as an agenda. It is something that he clearly feels passionately about. It is an issue on which we disagree because we feel that the priorities lie elsewhere. At the same time, his argument is fundamentally

undermined by the fact that the Government that his party supports at Westminster is pursuing benefits changes that will see £1 billion of benefits cuts directly affect children in Scotland.

**Gavin Brown** *rose—*

**Mark McDonald:** I see that Mr Brown wishes to leap to the defence of his UK coalition colleague, so I will allow him to put forward an argument on Mr Rennie's behalf.

**Gavin Brown:** Purely in the interests of accuracy, can Mr McDonald tell us whether the benefits budget for the next financial year will go up or down?

**Mark McDonald:** The point that Mr Brown misses, which he always misses, is the impact that the budget has, in that it has changed to being linked to the consumer prices index, it does not take into account some of the changes that are taking place in the economy and it completely offsets the tax changes that he has trumpeted in the chamber. Those are the points that he fails to understand and always fails to take into account.

I note that Mr Brown was receiving some support for his remarks from the Labour benches, which I thought was remarkable. I would have thought that, of all the people who would have joined in condemning the UK Government's approach to benefits, Labour members would be among them, but apparently not.

A number of my colleagues have made an important point regarding social cohesion: why it is important to consider universal benefits as being part of the social fabric. The point was made in evidence to the Health and Sport Committee in a written submission from Dr Gerry McCartney, the head of the public health observatory division at NHS Health Scotland. He said:

"there are numerous dangers with a policy approach which reduces universal provision of services (e.g. means-testing prescription charges, school meals, dentistry and pensions) as this undermines the collectivism which supports taxation to pay for these services, increases stigma for those who use the services and results in reduced investment and reduced service quality".

We believe that those who are paying into the pot, often at a higher rate, should be entitled to receive something back at the end of or during the process.

On prescriptions, I have been receiving missives on Twitter from Labour councillors, saying that we are giving free prescriptions to rich people. No—we are giving free prescriptions to sick people. There is a difference. Illness does not take account of someone's income when it hits them. Therefore, they should be entitled to the same rights as anybody else who is struck by illness.

The point about stigma is important. If two people are in the chemist to get their prescriptions and one has to pay at the counter while the other does not, that immediately indicates that one is on a low income but the other is not. That creates a stigma for the person who is receiving the free prescription in that they are marked out as somebody who requires the help of the state, rather than as somebody who is entitled to the help of the state. That is an important distinction.

On the issue of affordability, I have to laugh at the juxtaposition of the points that Labour members have made. They wave around the not-so-secret document and quote things from it that are already in the public domain. Mr Macintosh says that the SNP is considering the affordability of pensions as if that is a bad thing for a Government to do, but Labour members then tell us that it is a good thing that the Labour Party is considering the affordability of universal services. On the one hand, it is bad for the Scottish Government to consider the affordability of pensions; on the other, it is a really good thing that Labour is considering the affordability of universal services.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will Mark McDonald give way?

**Mark McDonald:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is in his last minute, Mr Macintosh.

**Mark McDonald:** I am sorry, but I have only 30 seconds left.

**Ken Macintosh:** That is very convenient.

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

**Mark McDonald:** Mr Macintosh can pass the point to Ms Dugdale for her winding-up speech.

If considering affordability is bad in relation to pensions, Mr Macintosh must also accept that it is bad in relation to universal services. If it is good for universal services, surely it is also good to consider affordability with regard to pensions.

We have an indication of at least one area where the Labour Party thinks that universality should be continued. Kezia Dugdale, who will be summing up the debate for the Labour Party, said on "Call Kaye" on 26 September 2012, the day after the "something for nothing" speech:

"I think that probably free prescription charges would need to stay."

She can tell us in her summing-up speech whether she agrees with herself.

16:08

**Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):** The previous speaker indicated that it is a good thing that the cabinet secretary was analysing the affordability of pensions. In our view, that indicates his concerns about whether or not budgets can support pensions in the future and about what plans need to be made to ensure that the economic environment can deliver. Why is it not sensible for us also to consider the affordability of the various services that are currently provided from the public budget and to decide whether or not the provision of those services can be paid for?

When the topic for the debate was first announced, I was concerned that it had been chosen by the Scottish Government to give SNP members the opportunity to claim that their party was the champion of universal services and to advance scaremongering claims that Opposition parties want to remove services from vulnerable people and to erode the provision of the welfare state. Unfortunately, my concerns have proved justified.

John Swinney has acknowledged that his budget finances are challenged. I remind him that those challenges are being faced across the western world, not solely here and, as he says, south of the border.

In addition, Robert Black, the former Auditor General for Scotland, indicated:

"People think it's been tough up until now but there's still two-thirds of the spending cuts still to be made between now and 2014. The moves being made by the Labour party in Scotland to actually at least start asking the questions I think is a good thing."

Until he made that statement, he was lauded in the chamber as a man of common sense and some vision for the future.

We must be honest with the people of Scotland. Universal services are an ideal to which we aspire but, in this new world, we must also take into account affordability and necessity.

**Mark McDonald:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Graeme Pearson:** A combination of universal and targeted benefits offers the best way forward for Scotland, and it provides the best support for our most vulnerable.

If we look past the promises that the Government makes, we see a gulf between its actions and words. On justice, for instance, although the SNP promised 1,000 extra police officers, it has actually allowed a cut of 977 police staff since 2010. Without doubt, that means that some recruits will have to be taken off the front line to do backroom jobs.

At the same time, the Government refuses to guarantee the future of local police stations, it is attempting to close a number of local courts and we hear conflicting statements regarding police officers' terms and conditions.

Scottish Labour increased the number of police officers by 1,500, tackled antisocial behaviour and began to seize criminal assets and invest them in the areas that were hardest hit by serious violent crime. It also spent more than £10 million on closed-circuit television cameras to make Scotland's streets safer.

I understand as well as anyone that times are tough and that the economic climate will have an impact on public services, but I cannot tolerate a Government misleading people in Scotland and being dishonest with the electorate.

The recent changes in legal aid provision demonstrate the contradictions in the commitment to universal services. The SNP's universal provision now means that a citizen with a disposable income of more than £82 a week or capital of more than £750 must contribute towards the cost of their defence.

Those proposals led to lawyers taking part in boycotts and protests and to them warning that innocent accused people could be incentivised to plead guilty.

**Mark McDonald:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Graeme Pearson:** Although an individual accused of their first offence could now be required to pay, figures show that between 2009 and 2012 more than 6,500 people received more than 10 grants of legal aid and far more than 100 people received more than 30 grants. There must be a balance between providing legal aid for those who require it most and ensuring that repeat offenders do not abuse the system.

The hypocrisy on universal services is most clearly illustrated by the case of one of my constituents under an SNP health service that is repeatedly described as free at the point of use.

My constituent suffers from bowel cancer and the only drug that doctors have found that has a positive impact on her disease is cetuximab. The drug is available to patients in the rest of the UK and in some parts of Scotland but, as a result of the current delivery of universal services, she and her family have had to pay £800 per treatment to deal with her ailment.

My constituent's case makes a mockery of the claim that healthcare in Scotland is universal and free at the point of use. It shows how much of a postcode lottery it has become. It also clearly demonstrates the gulf between what the Government promises and what it delivers.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth acknowledges that he has made choices in his budget. My constituent and many like her face the results of those choices.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close now.

**Graeme Pearson:** The Government would far prefer to give Fred Goodwin and his like free travel at the cost of my constituent.

The debate is about fairness.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please close.

**Graeme Pearson:** We need to support those who count on our support.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Right, that is enough. Thank you.

**Graeme Pearson:** Dispensing largess carelessly—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is enough, Mr Pearson. Thank you.

16:14

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** Before I go on to say what I want to say, I will talk about the previous speaker. Graeme Pearson talked about the SNP causing fear and scaremongering, then went on to say that we brought in 1,000 extra police but sacked 1,000 police staff, and he said that all those police officers are now behind desks. I have spoken to a number of fairly senior police officers during the past few months, not one of whom has told me that police officers are working behind desks. As a matter of fact, they have told me that it would be illegal to replace someone who had just been paid off with a police officer to do the same job. The reason why the police can manage with fewer staff—although it is unfortunate—is modernisation of the service. He will find that most cases are in Strathclyde, and I suspect that the modernisation programme will now be taken across the rest of the country.

Graeme Pearson continually goes on about what is coming down the track and he is right that it is terrible, but it was made in Westminster and continued by Westminster, and he is suggesting that we hold on to Westminster. The only solution that he is not willing to look at is our being given the powers to control finances, tax and the welfare benefits system for the people of Scotland.

"I think that universal benefits which go across the population are an important bedrock of our society".

Those words of wisdom are not mine; they are the words of the leader of the UK Labour Party, Ed Miliband, and they were spoken during an

interview on "The Andrew Marr Show" earlier this year. He is absolutely right, but unfortunately the leader of the Labour group in the Scottish Parliament, Johann Lamont, appears to believe that it is time to get rid of those universal services that are crucial to our vision of a just and fair society.

Some people agree with Ms Lamont about the sustainability of universal services. According to one commentator, there is now a

"consensus around cutting universal benefits".

Unfortunately for Ms Lamont and the Labour Party in Scotland, that cheerleader for their views is Peter Hoskin, who is an associate editor of the centre-right blog, "conservativehome".

I will not spend my time going over the Scottish Government's record on universal services because we have already heard a lot about free tuition, bus passes, elderly care and prescriptions. Instead, I will focus on the impact that such services have and why Peter Hoskin, Johann Lamont and their colleagues are wrong in wishing to see them end.

As many members do, I represent a hugely diverse constituency. In Cathcart, we have the suburb of Newlands, picturesque Cathcart village and Carmunnock, but we also have areas that are beset with real problems of poverty and deprivation, including parts of Castlemilk, Kennishead and Carnwadric, which border Johann Lamont's constituency. It is also important to recognise that my constituency contains a number of areas that are filled with households that are just making ends meet. They are neither impoverished nor are they particularly well off, but have enough money to pay the bills with some disposable income left over. Many of those households would be hugely affected by the abolition of universal services that is envisaged by the Tories and Scottish Labour.

I recently met some young people from high schools in Castlemilk who have the ambition to go on to university and get a degree. Many of them will be first among their families or friends to go to university. Imagine what it would do to that aspiration and desire to learn, to live independently, perhaps to travel abroad, to get a qualification and to get a good job if I were to go back to their schools and tell them that they will have to pay thousands of pounds for their education, either up front or through the back door. Johann Lamont once taught in Castlemilk and—dare I say it?—she knows how disappointed and disillusioned those young people would be to have confirmed once again their belief that university is not for the likes of them.

What about the elderly couple, both of whom have worked and paid into the system for their

entire lives, and who are now looking to enjoy their retirement? They do not have a huge pension, but their free bus pass and the fact that they do not have to worry about prescription bills certainly helps them to get about. No way can we accuse them of having “something for nothing”, as it has been so crassly put.

It could be claimed that Johann Lamont was not referring to those people, but that she was referring to people who have an income, such as Fred Goodwin. As usual, we have just heard from Labour about him, but funnily enough it was not mentioned that the Labour Party made him Sir Fred Goodwin. About 1 per cent of people in Scotland earn £100,000 or more; how many of them are queuing up to get bus passes? I do not earn anything like that, although I am very fortunate to earn a very good salary. I know that if members were to look at me they would not think that I turned 60 the other week. I refused to apply for my bus pass. I suspect that most people would do exactly the same.

It would not be the top 1 per cent of income earners who would suffer under Johann Lamont's plan; it would be families from across my constituency and people in constituencies throughout Glasgow who work hard and pay their bills but have very little excess income. Is Johann Lamont really suggesting that they deserve to be penalised for having a little put by to help their sons and daughters to go to university, or to pay for that wee holiday that they can now afford because of free concessionary travel, or to live pain free because they do not have to decide what medicines they can afford? Yes—they have some disposable income at the end of the month, but they are not the millionaires that we hear about all the time from those who wish to make political capital out of people's fears.

The really depressing thing about this is that even if we went down the route that the Labour Party and its colleagues are suggesting, it would not save us any money. From a 2012 Fabian Society report, we hear about a 1998 report by Walter Korpi and Joachim Palme about the paradox of redistribution that states:

“The more we target benefits at the poor only ... the less likely we are to reduce poverty and inequality”

The report goes on to say that we are also less likely to save money. For economic reasons, it does not work. For reasons of sustainability of society it does not work. For reasons of common humanity it does not work; colleagues have touched on the fact that we do not want to stigmatise people. Nobody in the chamber should be going down that route. I ask members to support the cabinet secretary's motion.

16:20

**Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde)**

**(Lab):** I agree with Malcolm Chisholm, who said that he was puzzled by the nature of the debate. We had a flat performance from the cabinet secretary in his opening speech, confirming the embarrassing situation that he finds himself in, in being forced publicly to deny the views that he has argued in private. Whatever has happened to this modernising cabinet secretary? In the heady days of the historic concordat, we had the single outcome agreements, outcome-focused policy decisions, shared services across the public sector, and the integration of public services—and, of course, he has brought about the independent budget review. They were all radical at the time and prepared us for the change that needed to take place. That was in 2010.

Crawford Beveridge described the financial challenge of our public sector as the biggest since the second world war. John Swinney has distanced himself from Crawford Beveridge today, but in 2010 he went on tour with Crawford Beveridge. John Swinney was so enthused by Beveridge's report and what it found that he went on a public tour with him and attended public meetings with him. I distinctly recall one meeting that was reported to the Local Government and Communities Committee at that time, in Livingston the night before John Swinney gave evidence to my committee.

If Crawford Beveridge was used to provide the economic imperative for action—I am not saying that John Swinney was wrong; I am saying that he was right—the Campbell Christie review was, of course, to provide the moral imperative. The message from Christie could not be any clearer. He said:

“Alongside a decade of growth in public spending, inequalities have grown, too. Between the highest and lowest achievers at school, between the life expectancy and health of the richest and the poorest, and between the static wages of the lowest paid and the booming bonuses of the highest, our public services have somehow failed to make our country fairer.”

That was what the cabinet secretary was presented with at the time. In hard times, we have a bigger responsibility—which John Swinney is now shirking—to get this right.

**John Swinney:** I am grateful to Mr McNeil for giving way. His speech would be assisted if Mr McNeil would perhaps spend a moment reflecting on the recommendations of the independent budget review that I have accepted and implemented, with my reforming zeal, and the recommendations of the Christie commission that I have accepted and implemented, with my reforming zeal, rather than parroting rubbish about no progress in those independent reports.



**Duncan McNeil:** The cabinet secretary may puff himself up like a peacock in the chamber, but we know that he is the chicken in the Cabinet who is not prepared to fight for what is right. In hard times, we as politicians have a bigger responsibility to get this right. That is the cause—it is serious stuff. It is our cause, because there is a price being paid by people across the country because of his failure to act and he will be held to account for that. That is the cause that motivates Labour. We want—as others here do—a fairer Scotland that shares the burden.

Those of us who value public services cannot stand back and allow the quality of those services to diminish. At a time of disinvestment, it is even more important to plan that disinvestment. If only we had a cabinet secretary who was prepared to act on what he really believes. As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said, to secure social justice and sustainable economic growth,

“The real test will be achieving fairness in the midst of cuts.”

Disinvesting how—I am sorry, but I cannot read my own writing. Deciding now to cut spending is an even more important issue.

**Mark McDonald:** Where would Mr McNeil draw the line? Does he believe that rich people should be entitled to free treatment, including hip operations, on the national health service? If so, what distinguishes those from free prescriptions?

**Duncan McNeil:** We all know—this is why we need a debate on universality—that universal healthcare does not cure the inequality between rich and poor. The fundamental issue is that universality in itself does not cure those ills. It is dishonest to say that universality cures all. Universality is not a bad thing, but we are arguing that deciding how to cut spending and who should take more of the strain is even more important than deciding how much the cuts should be. That is what the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says.

It is important that we get this right and that we get beyond the referendum. Whatever our constitutional position, we will still have the problems. To put off the decisions from 2010 until 2014 and then 2016 will be a betrayal of the people whom we are supposed to represent. We need to act; John Swinney knows that we need to act, but he has been prevented from acting because he has lost the debate in the Cabinet. We need somebody to make that case in the Cabinet and we need an SNP Government that can match the rhetoric with action.

16:27

**Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP):** Let me begin by thanking the Scottish Government for today's debate. First, I say to

Duncan McNeil that no one on the SNP benches is suggesting for a moment that universality is a cure-all, or that universality is the only route to tackling poverty. I do not think that anyone on the SNP benches has argued for that proposition. However, what might help us to begin to tackle poverty a little more would be transfer of the levers of economic control to this place, where Duncan McNeil sits, rather than keeping them in the hands of the Tories, for which he is currently campaigning.

Before I come on to the wider issues underpinning universalism, let me deal quickly with the council tax freeze, which was picked up on during the debate. Mr Rennie made the extraordinary comment that a council tax freeze is okay during the good times. The flip-side of that argument, I suppose, must be that a council tax freeze is bad in the bad times. That seems to be a peculiar form of economic illiteracy. Surely, if any time is right to introduce a council tax freeze, it is during the bad times when families are struggling to make ends meet. That is surely the correct time to freeze the council tax in order to reduce the burden on them. It will be interesting to hear when Mr Rennie thinks would be the right time to increase the burden of taxation on families and others.

**Drew Smith:** If the council tax is a regressive form of taxation, how can freezing a regressive form of taxation be progressive? Can Jamie Hepburn explain that to me?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I presume that, if the council tax had not been frozen, it would have continued on the trajectory that it was on under the Labour Party, when it increased exponentially. The burden would have increased across the board, including on the poorest families in society. That seems to be a peculiar line of argument for Mr Smith to take.

Siobhan McMahon said—I do not want to take up too much time on this, because I want to focus on the wider issues—that she had a concern about the effect of the council tax freeze on the quality of local services. She said that we need to have an honest debate about the issue. That is interesting, given that a leaflet that was distributed by Hamilton Labour Party for the May 2012 council elections in South Lanarkshire, which is in Ms McMahon's area, stated that South Lanarkshire Labour's very first pledge was to

“PROTECT our frontline services and freeze the Council Tax”.

If she feels that that is a dishonest position, I suggest that she get her own party's house in order before starting to lecture other parties about their position.

I will now focus on the wider principles of universalism. As Christine Grahame said, the

Government has set solidarity and cohesion as two of its main “purpose targets”. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations recently issued a report that set out that solidarity and cohesion would be undermined by the rolling back of universalism. It said in its report:

“In the UK, means-testing has expanded steadily to overshadow the contributory principle to a degree that isn’t matched in the Nordic countries, Germany or the Netherlands for example. In part this explains why public attitudes to benefit recipients have become harsher”.

We have other evidence, such as that in the submission from One Parent Families Scotland to the Welfare Reform Committee that stated:

“Universal benefits are very efficient to deliver. Once a means test is introduced, it has to be administered and policed, which is very expensive.”

I concur with those perspectives. As has been remarked, it is not the case that we can provide every service universally, but the SNP in Government has made progress in widening the array of universal benefits. I think that that should be welcomed and that we should avoid rolling back those advances.

In the time that I have left, I want to focus on one or two of the specific changes to which I have referred. As I think Bob Doris said, when the policy of phasing out prescription charges was introduced, about 600,000 adults living in Scotland had an annual income of less than £16,000 but were not entitled to free prescriptions. There has been a lot of talk about ending the free prescriptions policy and ensuring that those who can afford to pay do pay, but we should remember those 600,000 people who earned less than £16,000 a year who had to pay. They are people like the individual that one of my constituents who is a pharmacist told me about, who was one of those who came to the pharmacy in tears when they realised that they could not afford their prescription.

If that anecdotal evidence is not enough, we can look at the research that was undertaken in 2008 involving a review of 173 studies of prescription charges in 15 high-income countries, which found that prescription charges

“led patients to forego the use of essential drugs, reduced adherence to treatment, and increased the likelihood of needing more intensive care and dying.”

The idea that we should roll back free prescriptions should be rejected.

I also want to talk about the national concessionary bus pass scheme. Unlike Ms Grahame and Mr Dornan, I am not of an age to benefit from the scheme, but I support the initiative. It was interesting to hear Mr Macintosh make great play earlier of the fact that it was his party that introduced the scheme and that it was

its ball to burst. Frankly, if his party is not prepared to back the scheme when it comes before a parliamentary committee and if his party sets up a cuts commission that says that nothing is off the table, then it is no wonder if some of us begin to think that the concessionary travel scheme is under threat at the hands of the Labour Party.

Scotland’s public services are safe in the hands of the SNP.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I call on Willie Rennie, who has up to six minutes, please.

16:35

**Willie Rennie:** I thought that Bob Doris started off in a very reasonable and consensual way. I was very impressed. He flipped halfway through his speech, but he was very reasonable and sensible in explaining the tax spending and charging responsibilities of Government. I thought that he presented the UK’s tax changes in a very reasonable way and gave credit to us for raising the tax threshold to £10,000. I was very grateful to Bob Doris for doing that.

**Bob Doris:** I thank Mr Rennie for his kind words, but just for clarity I point out that cutting the upper rate of taxation from 50 per cent to 45 per cent for those who earn over £150,000 a year is an appalling policy decision by the UK Government.

**Willie Rennie:** Bob Doris should never be embarrassed about praising the UK Government for some of its tax changes. He should always be proud of doing so and I will give him any encouragement that he needs at any time for that.

I think that in what has been a reasonable debate, three main arguments were drawn out about universalism as a principle and as a policy. One was from Clare Adamson, who talked about buy-in. The argument that, in order for society as a whole to buy in and contribute to taxation, people need to get something back from doing so, is quite compelling. There is a strong argument in favour of things being free in order for people to feel that they are part of that wider society.

However, I do not think that we should allow people to believe that other services are not universal. If we concede that only things that were once charged for but are now free are the universal services, that ignores roads, schools, hospitals and the police service, for instance. I regard all those as being universal services that are available to everybody. We have never charged for those services—except, I presume, before the NHS—but people do not regard them as “universal”. As part of the argument, we need to

be able to explain to people that universal services go beyond prescription charges, bus services and tuition fees. That is important; however, Clare Adamson made a valid point.

Mark McDonald's point about stigma was also interesting. One of the main arguments for free school meals was that kids seeing their friends getting free meals when they are not getting free meals causes a divide within the school. I accept that part of the argument. However, as Malcolm Chisholm pointed out, most of the welfare benefits that are reserved to Westminster are targeted, not universal, so we need to be careful with that principle. We accept that it is an issue that should be factored into the debate, but it is not an absolute that we would apply at all times, otherwise the cost would be extortionate.

The other argument is that it costs more to means test. I am sure that, under some circumstances—perhaps for prescriptions—that is the case. If the overall cost is not significant, means testing may not be of value. However, again, we should not extrapolate that principle from the limited areas that it covers just now, otherwise everything would be free because means testing would be so expensive that it would not be worth doing. Those were important points to raise, but they should not be taken as broader golden principles that should never be breached.

Although, as Bob Doris was, everybody has been reasonable in saying that the debate is all about choices, many members have talked about universalism as a principle, but I heard nobody say that the principle of universalism should apply to the services that I mentioned earlier—dental treatment, eye treatment and home care up in Perth and Kinross—or to legal aid, which others have mentioned. Nobody has proposed going further. I take Jamie Hepburn's point that the debate is perhaps about how far we take universalism. If that had been publicly stated by the First Minister today in his speech to the Scottish Trades Union Congress, I would have more respect for the position. However, the position is being presented as a golden principle that has never been breached and which only the SNP can protect. We know that that is simply not the case; other parties support universal services in many areas, including the NHS, schools, the police, nurseries and roads.

Welfare reform has been mentioned by several members. I agree with Christine Grahame about the rhetoric about "strivers and skivers". I do not buy into that, and it does not help for politicians at Westminster to make the case that such a divide exists. Many people need that safety net and should never be considered as skivers.

However, along with Christina McKelvie, Christine Grahame did not propose any change to

the welfare budget at Westminster. I accept that a big proportion of the welfare budget is pensions, but the rest of it is welfare and it is very expensive. We need to find a way to reform it. Everybody says that we need to reform it, but nobody says how we should reform it. Those who are not in favour of any reform need to consider that the cost of restoring welfare benefits in Scotland would be £2.5 billion. I have not heard anybody in the chamber today suggest how they would pay for that, although what Parliament has to deal with is how to pay for things.

As Graeme Pearson and Liz Smith said, this is about affordability. We need to grapple with the competing and conflicting choices that we face. If we do not do that as a Parliament, we are letting the country down.

16:39

**Gavin Brown:** I will pick up on a couple of points that have been made in the debate before I make a few of my own.

A number of SNP members talked about how critical it is that all NHS services should be free at the point of delivery. That was their argument against prescription charging. That sounded good until the issue of dental treatment was brought into the debate. Perhaps the minister will explain in his concluding remarks why, if that is a principle that cannot be breached according to the Government, many people in this country pay for dental treatment. Is not that discrimination between those who can afford to pay and those who cannot afford to pay? The other argument that has been run today is that it costs a lot more money to means test. Why on earth do we not have free dental treatment in this country if means testing is genuinely more expensive? I hope that the Government can answer that question.

James Dornan accused all the other parties of scaremongering in their speeches. Without skipping a beat, he stated somewhat blithely a sentence later that all the other parties want to end all universal benefits in Scotland.

**James Dornan:** Will the member give way?

**Gavin Brown:** I do not know whether James Dornan does a great line in irony, but perhaps he wants to explain what he meant by that comment.

**James Dornan:** It would have been a magnificent line of irony, if only that were true. I did not say at any stage in my speech that the other parties want to end all universal benefits. If the member checks the *Official Report* later, he will find that that is the case.

**Gavin Brown:** I look forward to checking that. I make it absolutely clear that our party thinks that we ought to review where the priorities are and

where we get value for money, but we have certainly not said at any point that universal benefits ought to be ended. We simply think that there ought to be adaptations for some.

The principal point that I made in my opening remarks was that we must have the evidence base and data in order to have a serious debate on the subject. I am convinced that a serious debate is merited. We can reflect carefully and choose the absolutely correct priorities for this country only if we have the evidence base and the data in mind.

I am still unconvinced by the Government's reasoning for failing to give us 10-year or even shorter projections. The independent budget review was published before a UK Government spending review and a Scottish Government spending review. At that point, the cabinet secretary was able to give the independent budget review projections for the universal services that we have been debating. I ask again: if that was possible then, why on earth is it not possible now to give us the data so that all members can have a serious debate on the issue?

The Finance Committee quite rightly picked up on that issue when we reported on demographic change. The committee's recommendation 24 was:

"The Committee invites the Scottish Government to provide details of the work it is currently carrying out in forecasting the budgetary implications of demographic change."

That was agreed by the entire committee without division. It asked for that information. We were not given the information on projections in the Government's response, which came out last month, but I note that it stated:

"The guidance makes clear that Single Outcome Agreements should show what will be different for communities in ten years and the action that will be taken in response".

The Scottish Government is asking councils and community planning partnerships to outline what will be different in 10 years' time and what action they intend to take in response to those differences, but when it comes to central Government policies that have been put forward by the Scottish Government, it is unable and unwilling to do that. We deserve an explanation of why that is the case.

We have touched on a range of issues that could be looked at more deeply, of which concessionary travel is only one. With a budget that is pushing close to £200 million, it is worthy of greater review. It might not come as a surprise to learn that the Scottish Government had a review of the concessionary travel scheme in 2009. Paragraph 181 of its report says:

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

Recommendation 8 was:

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

If that was the Scottish Government's position when the scheme was reviewed in 2009, why is that not its position now?

The Christie commission quite rightly said:

"the issue of universality is usually posed as free provision for all versus means testing, whereas there are several other mechanisms—such as varying the age of eligibility—which can also reduce the spend."

We must target our resources carefully. We again repeat our request to the Scottish Government: why will it not give us the data so that we can have the debate?

16:45

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** I thought that Willie Rennie got it right when he said that the SNP wants the public to believe that it alone believes in universalism, that universalism is somehow a golden principle of the SNP and that everyone else wants targeted benefits.

However, the blunt reality is that that is simply not true. The SNP has presided over the provision of a number of targeted benefits since it came to power in 2007. To dental treatment—which has been mentioned—can be added optical vouchers, the cost of travel to hospitals, student bursaries, individual learning accounts, the education maintenance allowance, the energy assistance package and shared equity schemes. I could go on and on. It could be suggested that the Government might argue that it has just not got round to reforming those benefit schemes yet or that it would have reformed them if it had had the cash, but we know that that is not true either. I know of at least six SNP MSPs who are on record as supporting targeted interventions and benefits: Mike Russell, Kenneth Gibson, Alex Neil, Kenny MacAskill, John Swinney and Shona Robison.

I could go through quotes for all of them, but I will pick on just three, starting with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. When he was asked about the energy assistance programme, he said:

"The purpose of redesigning the programme was to target it more at the pensioners and families who most require assistance to make their homes more energy efficient and who are at the lower end of the income scale."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 2009; c 17481.]

Secondly, Kenny MacAskill, who is the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, said:

"I am pleased to see that many people in the justice system ... have accepted the principle that it is right that those who can afford to pay towards the cost of their defence should do so".—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 18 September 2012; c 1717.]

Thirdly, Mike Russell, who is the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, said:

"Put bluntly, universality now drags down both the quality of service to those most in need, and the ability of government to provide such services. However"—

and this is the key—

"our political parties do not have the courage to address the issue for fear of losing votes."

The blunt reality is that if those six MSPs got together in Cabinet, we could have a Cabinet full of people who supported targeted benefits and who could vote for them. However, that will not happen, because in the SNP's view targeted benefits are not a vote winner. For me, that exposes the fact that the Government is driven by focus group politics rather than by political leadership that is designed to drive rather than follow public opinion.

I believe that Johann Lamont has demonstrated real political leadership on the issue. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Kezia Dugdale:** She did that when she said:

"What we have is a debate between competing good things".—[*Official Report*, 13 November 2012; c 13328.]

The SNP wants to caricature the debate as one of good versus evil, in which its finance-defying front bench will protect everyone from the dark forces on the Labour benches who are apparently out to steal hard-fought benefits and services from people. The reality is that this is not a cartoon strip.

**Mark McDonald:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Kezia Dugdale:** No, thank you.

It is a Parliament that is filled with real people who were motivated to enter politics to make a difference. Regardless of our differing ideological perspectives, we are all here with the same purpose: to serve the public, to debate issues and to make hard choices, together, about how the money is spent. In that sense, we are all on the same side.

I say to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth that we agree on the need for targeted and universal benefits. Let us be honest about that. We just disagree on the mix, and it does the Parliament no good for us to pretend in the parliamentary knockabout that our positions can be presented as black versus white or good versus evil. In the

words of the Christie commission, what we need is a "non-polarised and transparent environment" for debate.

We also need to raise the standard of the debate, which I will try to do by taking on what Christina McKelvie said. She asked what happened to the idea of tackling child poverty. Labour managed to lift 600,000 children out of child poverty. We did that through a targeted public policy approach; it was an approach that was targeted at women and which included the national minimum wage, tax credits, part-time jobs and—crucially—rights that enabled trade unions to reinforce them, childcare, and paternity and maternity rights. A concerted attempt was made across portfolios to target women.

Let me take that argument and apply it to John Swinney's opening remarks. He admitted that his reformed colleges programme has led to fewer part-time opportunities and more places for young people. The consequence of fewer part-time places in colleges is a detrimental impact on women.

We will feel that for years to come in our child poverty statistics. The employment stats already demonstrate that. Inactivity among women is up 25,000 this year; for men, it is down 1,000. The inactivity rate is up 1.4 per cent in Scotland, but down 1 per cent in the UK. The trends are going the wrong way for the cabinet secretary. He hailed the progress on youth employment—which I welcome—but he must recognise that that is a result not of young people moving into jobs, but of them moving out of the employment statistics through inactivity.

I go as far as to argue that the Scottish Government's approach to youth employment is targeted rather than universal. It is focused on the business end of the market and helping those young people who are closest to getting into the job market. The Government completely abandoned the young people who have been out of work for two years or more. That is a targeted approach driven by its need to satisfy statistics and get out a good press release.

I have only a minute and a half left, so I cannot pay tribute to Siobhan McMahon's speech and the important things that she said about higher education. However, in relation to what Mark McDonald's comments exposed about him, I say to him that I have given him some nice small talk in the canteen for the last time. For such a bright guy, I never fail to be astonished by his inability to get it. Johann Lamont is opening up a debate. She is asking for people's thoughts and opinions. She is not so set in stone that she cannot move. I am sorry that the word "debate" is so hard for people in the SNP to understand; clearly, they are given a

microchip at the beginning of the week, which tells them what to reiterate for the rest of it.

**Mark McDonald:** Will the member give way?

**Kezia Dugdale:** I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

**Mark McDonald:** But I have not got the microchip in.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I am in my last minute.

The squabble about universal versus targeted, public versus private and good versus evil is simply a huge diversionary tactic to cloak what is going on, which is a blatant attempt to park difficult decisions, unsustainable spending commitments and the hard truths about our ageing population until after the referendum. It is a deeply cynical ploy that seeks only to widen the cracks in our broken politics.

The SNP will no doubt wake up to the challenges that we face the day after the referendum. If it wins, the referendum deceit will have been worth it; if it loses, it will be somebody else's problem. That is what is so sad about the debate. While the SNP promises all things to all people and pleads that it has the moral high ground on universality, people suffer and hard choices—the very hard choices that we were elected to make—are ignored. I support Ken Macintosh's amendment.

16:52

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** I rise to support John Swinney's motion.

It is four years since Alistair Darling, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, promised us cuts that were "deeper and tougher" than those of Margaret Thatcher. At that time, he was promising a 40 per cent reduction in the Scottish Government's capital budget and a near 10 per cent reduction in our resource budget. When we got that news, the Scottish Government had to take important, difficult, tough and strategic decisions. Contrary to what Duncan McNeil said, we faced up to the reality that it would be another 16 years before the real-terms value of our budget would be back to what it was before Alistair Darling became Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We took decisions, led by John Swinney in the Cabinet. First, we had to make a choice about whether to maximise the number of jobs in Scotland and the number of people in work or allow pay rises to continue in line with inflation. Given that inflation at that time was between 4 and 5 per cent, we took the difficult decision that jobs were the priority because it is much more important to keep as many people in work as we

possibly can. The price that we all had to pay for maximising the numbers in work was a pay freeze. That was a tough decision and choice; this Government faced up to that reality.

**Gavin Brown:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Neil:** I will in a minute.

Our second major decision was that we would ensure within that policy that, as far as possible, those who had the broadest shoulders would bear the bulk of the burden and we would help those who were low paid, in poverty and most vulnerable. Therefore, although we froze wages for everyone else, we gave a pay rise to everyone who earned less than £21,000 a year.

**Duncan McNeil:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Alex Neil:** I will in a minute.

We took other major decisions. We took the decision to pass on the Barnett consequential to the national health service, at a time when no one else in this Parliament agreed with such a policy. We took the decision to make prescriptions universally free, because of the evidence to which Christine Grahame referred. We took the decision to maintain concessionary travel for our older and disabled people and extend it to disabled veterans. We took the decision to abolish the tuition fees that Labour had introduced. Most recent, we took the decision to give all-out opposition to the Tory-Liberal policy of a bedroom tax, which will do so much damage in Scotland and elsewhere.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Alex Neil:** I am happy to take an intervention from Duncan McNeil, if he can finish the conversation that he is having. Duncan, I am happy to take your intervention—okay, he is not making an intervention.

**Ken Macintosh:** What about cuts in college places?

**Alex Neil:** I will come to that.

As a nation, we face three major strategic challenges, because we are living in austerity Britain. The first is the budgetary challenge. As I said, the budget cuts that have been imposed on this Parliament are deep and damaging. We live on a fixed budget. We do not currently have the power to borrow or to tax; we have to accept whatever budget is handed down to us.

I have to laugh at the Tories' demand for a 10-year forecast. The chancellor, in his budget two or three weeks ago, cut our budget for this year by another £50 million and cut our budget for next

year by another £50 million. The Tories cannot forecast days ahead, never mind decades ahead.

**Gavin Brown:** The cabinet secretary is being a little disingenuous on that point. What are the projected 10-year costs? The Government was able to provide projections for the independent budget review; why is it unable to do that now?

**Alex Neil:** Mr Swinney explained in inordinate detail why that is not possible.

Let me say this about the budgetary challenge. If we had not had the Scottish Futures Trust we would have had to invent it. I remember the Labour Party, the Tories and the Liberals ridiculing the Scottish Futures Trust—another policy that was led by Mr Swinney, Mr McNeil. If we did not have the Scottish Futures Trust, we would not be investing the £2.5 billion that we would not otherwise have.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Alex Neil:** Now I will take an intervention from Mr Macintosh.

**Ken Macintosh:** I thank the cabinet secretary. When Mr Swinney said

“the Scottish public sector may be able to limit individual pay increases over the short term and constrain total increases in paybill costs through management of the size of the workforce”,

what does Mr Neil think that that meant?

**Alex Neil:** It means that we have to cope with the budget cuts that were imposed by Alistair Darling and by George Osborne. I said that we took a strategic decision to keep jobs, as a number 1 priority. We have stuck to that and we have had a policy of no compulsory redundancies.

I have to say, in my capacity as cabinet secretary for health, that we will take no lessons from the Labour Party on cuts in budgets or jobs. That is the party that, down south, cut the NHS budget by £20 billion, whereas we are passing on the Barnett consequential to the national health service.

Unlike the three unionist parties, we are rising to the challenge—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Alex Neil:** Malcolm Chisholm said that the underlying current of this debate was not universalism but independence. I say to Mr Chisholm, for whom I have the highest respect, that he and many others like him will have a choice to make next year. It will be a simple choice between two futures: a future in austerity Britain, being run by the Tories and their Liberal poodles, or a future in a prosperous Scotland.

Given that everyone wants a forecast, I will finish with three of them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** One will be enough.

**Alex Neil:** Forecast 1 is that next year we will get a yes vote; forecast 2 is that we will be independent by 2016; and forecast 3 is that within five to 10 years we will be one of the richest countries in the world.

## Decision Time

17:00

### The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Gavin Brown is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Willie Rennie will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-06225.3, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06225, in the name of John Swinney, on universal services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 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)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

### 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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 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)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)



**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 38, Against 72, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S4M-06225.2, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06225, in the name of John Swinney, on universal services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 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)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 15, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S4M-06225.1, in the name of Willie Rennie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06225, in the name of John Swinney,

on universal services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 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)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)

Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 15, Against 95, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S4M-06225, in the name of John Swinney, on universal services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy 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)  
 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)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)

Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 62, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament confirms its opposition to the further reductions that have been made to the Scottish budget as a result of the UK budget on 20 March 2013 and the damaging impact that the UK Government's approach to public spending is having on the economy, public services and households, including the most vulnerable in society, and supports the Scottish Government's continued commitment to both the social wage, including the universal benefits of free personal care, free prescriptions, concessionary travel, free eye tests and free tuition, and to the four pillars of public service reform, which together will help to ensure that the totality of public spending provides value for money, is sustainable and delivers the outcomes that matter most to Scotland's people and businesses.

## Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society

### The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-05710, in the name of David Torrance, on congratulating Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament congratulates the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society on its efforts to preserve the caves for future generations; understands that the caves are of significant historical value and that further study of the symbols and carvings, which include an unusually high quantity of Pictish art work, could progress understanding of Scottish cultural history, and believes that the caves have the potential to be a major tourist attraction in the Wemyss area and Fife.

17:07

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** I welcome to Parliament Mike McFarlane, chair of Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society, and members of the committee, volunteers and supporters and friends of the society.

Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society was formed in 1986 after vandals drove a car into Jonathan's cave, set fire to it and destroyed the swan drawing that is part of the Wemyss coat of arms and is now lost forever. The society's aims are to protect the caves, educate people and spread greater awareness of the caves' importance to a worldwide audience.

Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society must be congratulated on not only its efforts to preserve the caves but its vision for the future, in recognising the caves' potential for the Wemyss area and the benefits that they will bring locally and to the general Fife economy.

Sadly, though, the Wemyss caves are once again under threat from not only human interference but nature itself. Many of the caves will soon be lost through coastal erosion or land slips and, consequently, one of the jewels in the crown of Scottish history will be gone forever. It is essential that everyone helps Mike McFarlane and his team to resolve that issue as quickly as possible, to ensure the caves' preservation for posterity.

The Wemyss caves are of vital historical importance to Scotland, as they contain more historically significant markings than all the other caves in Britain. The historical importance of the Wemyss caves has been reiterated by a leading academic in early Scottish history and culture, Dr James Fraser, who stated:

"From the perspective of Scotland's early medieval past and its study, the significance of the Wemyss Caves can scarcely be exaggerated because they are a truly unique phenomenon. Objects and locations bearing the markings that have come to be known as 'Pictish symbols' represent the single largest body of evidence that has survived from the centuries when the Picts dominated political and cultural life in Scotland. The symbols are, so to speak, Scotland's hieroglyphics. To lose the examples in the Wemyss Caves—by far the richest, most numerous and most complex assemblage of all—would be an unutterable tragedy. All efforts to ensure their preservation and recording for posterity are to be encouraged."

The Wemyss caves include Jonathan's cave, the unnamed cave, St Margaret's well, the sloping cave, the east and west doo caves and the well cave. The caves, which are all different shapes and sizes, have been used by many groups of people for a wide variety of purposes over thousands of years, including prehistoric cave dwellers, the Picts, early Christians, Norsemen, Jacobites and smugglers. The markings in the caves can be classified in three groups: pre-Christian, Christian and Viking. The symbols and markings left by individual groups throughout the ages provide us with a valuable insight and understanding of their different cultures and living practices.

The drawing on the east wall of Jonathan's cave is one of the oldest drawings of a ship in Scotland—it is probably that of a Pictish ship. Pre-Christian drawings are mostly of Pictish origin and include elephant figures, animals and ornaments. The Christian drawings are mainly Pictish, but this time include early Christian symbols and cross markings. Those markings left by the Vikings show symbols of Norse gods: Thor with his hammer, followed by the sacred goat; Freya, portrayed as a goose; and Odin pictured as a trumpet form. However, there is still potentially much more to discover. In all probability, many hidden archaeological treasures are waiting to be unearthed in those sections of the caves that are partially or completely filled in.

The Wemyss caves have attracted a great deal of academic interest throughout the years but just how widespread that interest is internationally is perhaps best exemplified by the following. In 1990, while on a skiing holiday in Bulgaria, I engaged in a conversation with a couple from Germany. When I told them that I came from Fife, they proceeded to show me a four-page article from a German newspaper about the Wemyss caves. They could not understand why we had not protected and developed such an important historical site that was part of our heritage.

The well-known author, photographer and educationalist, Hamish Brown MBE, in his widely read book, "Along the Fife Coastal Path", remarked:

"It seems extraordinary that so little has been done to protect this unique site."

I recently attended Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society's annual lecture, which was delivered by Joanna Hambly of SCAPE—Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion—which is an organisation committed to the research and promotion of Scotland's coasts. Joanna's lecture, entitled "Visualising Wemyss caves", gave an excellent overview of how the plan to utilise state-of-the-art survey and visualisation methods to digitally preserve the interior of the caves and their carvings would enable people to explore the caves virtually in incredibly realistic detail. The project also affords an excellent opportunity for engagement with the local community.

Six of the Wemyss caves are situated on the western part of the east Wemyss coastline and form part of the Fife coastal path, which, at 117 miles, is the longest trail in Scotland, attracting thousands of walking visitors a year. That highlights the need for a purpose-built visitor centre, which would simultaneously raise the profile of east Wemyss by generating jobs and, hopefully, lead to greater investment in the area. It would also allow people to further their knowledge about this important part of Scottish history and provide many positive opportunities for active learning experiences, which would fulfil one of the aims of Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society.

I thank the Scottish Government and Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, for their efforts in bringing the matter to the attention of Historic Scotland, which is willing to provide technical advice and is considering grant support to achieve a long-term viable solution to ensuring that the caves remain intact for future generations.

Only yesterday, I had a meeting with David Paterson of Fife Council about the Wemyss caves, and I recently had a discussion with the National Lottery about the caves. It is now a case of bringing all the interested parties together to develop a long-term strategy for the caves in the Wemyss area, of which Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society, with its wealth of knowledge about the area, will be an integral part.

I thank Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society for its commitment and dedication in the past to the Wemyss caves and I thank all those involved for their continued fight for the caves' future and determination to highlight their historical importance to Scotland and the local area. Despite often having faced an uphill struggle over the years, they have not wavered in their belief in the importance of the Wemyss caves to our historical landscape. They have championed their cause with passion and enthusiasm in the belief that ultimately, by realising and bringing to fruition the

full potential of the caves in many different ways, they will not only benefit the area but preserve something of real historical value and one of the jewels in the crown of Scottish history for the benefit of future generations. That is why I will continue to offer my support and help them in any way I can to achieve their objectives.

I urge the minister and members here today to avail themselves of the opportunity to see the importance of the Wemyss caves by visiting on one of the open Sundays, which run from April to September.

17:15

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in this evening's debate and I congratulate David Torrance on securing this slot. I welcome members of the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society to the chamber. I hope that they find the debate an interesting and positive contribution to their work.

The society was established in 1986. I recognise its commitment and hard work in highlighting the importance of the caves and campaigning for their preservation. The society does a lot of work to gather and record information on the caves and to encourage others to take an interest. This debate is not its first engagement with Parliament. In 2000 it brought a petition to the Parliament following the loss of the foreshore path to coastal erosion and it received support from the Public Petitions Committee for further efforts to be made to protect the caves.

The Wemyss caves are a group of seven natural caves that lie along the coast immediately to the west of the village of West Wemyss. They are statutorily protected scheduled ancient monuments and are recognised as being of national importance.

The drawings in the Wemyss caves are unique. They depict Pictish symbols, early Christian imagery and Viking representations. They tell the story of the coast and the communities that lived and traded there and of those who smuggled there. The drawings provide important information for our understanding of Pictish imagery and how it represents life as well as death. They expand our knowledge of early drawing and carving techniques. Most importantly, they connect modern generations to history in a way that textbooks just cannot do.

The caves are difficult to access and the society is to be congratulated on the opportunities that it offers people to visit them through guided tours. The knowledge of the guides adds much to the experience of visiting the caves. It is not always easy to see the drawings, so the guides' expertise adds greatly to the experience.

There is potential for greater public engagement, but there are significant challenges to achieving that. Over the years the caves have been vulnerable to vandalism. A combination of wilful damage and neglect has led to a compromising of the quality of what the caves have to offer. The society recognised that fact when it formed, partly as a response to vandalism and fires being lit in the caves, which led to some of the work being lost for ever.

It is worth recognising that the caves are on private property. Clearly Fife Council and Historic Scotland have key interests in the future of the caves and, given their national importance, surely the Scottish Government also has a role in ensuring their future. However, the caves are on private land as part of the Wemyss estate, so there should be some responsibility and engagement at that level, too.

Although vandalism, natural weathering and inherent geographical instability have all played a part in the deterioration of the caves in their landscape, coastal erosion has been and continues to be the greater challenge. Since 1989 Fife Council and Historic Scotland have invested in coastal defence works, but the challenge of success in this area must not be underestimated. This stretch of coastline is experiencing considerable coastal erosion. The coastline has retreated by at least 30m since 1974, which presents challenges not only to the caves but to many villages and communities along Fife's coastline. The caves are at the mercy of the elements.

The Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion Trust—otherwise known as SCAPE—has been involved in recording the Pictish carvings in particular. As Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, recently recognised,

“SCAPE has led the field in highlighting the erosion of coastal sites and it is a credit to its members and research that it has found a way to use incredibly accessible mobile technology to improve the national records through the creative use of local expertise.”

We need to consider all options for the caves. Coastal erosion presents significant challenges to achieving a long-term or permanent solution, but we need to consider the options for long-term management.

A sustainable solution needs to be found that means that the knowledge that the drawings give us and the insight that they provide into the history of the shoreline and of Scotland can be saved. We should not underestimate the threat of coastal erosion or how difficult and costly coastal protection is, but we can be committed to a future for these important historical depictions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I should have pointed out that speeches should be four minutes. I call Richard Lyle, to be followed by Murdo Fraser.

17:19

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, thank David Torrance for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I welcome members of the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society to their Parliament.

In today's modern society we are often encouraged to look to the future and to the next big thing around the corner. It is important, however, not to forget our past, which has helped to shape who we are as individuals and as a nation, and our heritage.

In this debate we are considering the Wemyss caves and the history that has been preserved there. The caves appear to have been created by sea action thousands of years ago, and they house a large collection of carvings on their walls. It has been said that there are more carvings on the walls of those caves than in all the other caves in Britain put together. The caves at Wemyss have been used by various groups including prehistoric cave dwellers, Picts, Norsemen, early Christians, Jacobites and smugglers throughout history—a fact which perhaps explains the large number of carvings.

Despite the obvious historical relevance of the caves and the fact that they are a registered scheduled monument, they are now under threat. I note that steps are being taken to prevent further damage from coastal erosion, landslips and human interference. Some caves have already been lost, along with all the historically important carvings that they contained.

The Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society must be commended for its work to date in preserving the caves. Since the society was formed in October 1986 following wilful damage to the caves by vandals, its members have sacrificed a great deal of time and expense to promote and preserve the caves. The volunteers' work is varied and creative, and it covers everything from book publications to hosting annual historical lectures. In particular, the society holds a series of open Sundays, when visitors are given the chance to explore the caves and the museum dedicated to them.

Scotland's history has proved to be vitally important to the economy on both a national and a local level, and the Wemyss caves could provide a vital tourist attraction to Fife if they are preserved properly. They also provide excellent educational opportunities to the local schools—they represent an active learning opportunity.

It is important that all possible avenues are explored to preserve and protect these historically significant caves and the carvings that are contained within them. That includes the project that is being run by the Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion Trust, which plans to use digital technology on the caves. The project is welcome, as it has the capacity to make the cave carvings accessible to a wider audience, which it is hoped will in turn increase the level of interest in the caves.

Digitally reproduced images are no substitute for actually visiting the caves and seeing them at first hand, and I encourage as many people as possible to do so. Living in the west of Scotland, I might not live near the Wemyss caves but, like David Torrance, I compliment and support the work that the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society is doing to keep this important heritage for Scotland.

17:23

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I congratulate David Torrance on securing the debate and lodging the motion, and I join members in congratulating the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society on all the great work that it does. It is fair to say that the vast majority of Scots are completely unaware that Wemyss plays host to the greatest cave grouping in Britain and northern Europe. Indeed, I was basically unaware of that myself until the topic of the debate appeared among the list of motions. I hope that, simply by being held, the debate will bring some much-needed public awareness of this somewhat undiscovered attraction in Fife. David Torrance is to be commended for highlighting it.

As Mr Torrance said, it was after vandalism destroyed the swan carving in 1986 that the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society was set up, with the remit to preserve and promote cave carvings that date back some 3,500 years. The society's volunteers stage seven open Sunday events between April and September, as we have heard. They are an opportunity for members of the public to take part in expert-led guided walks and other activities to learn more about the caves. Such is the appetite for the events that visitors travel from all four corners of the UK and from further afield to take part. I am sure that members of all parties will acknowledge the hard work, dedication and determination of all the volunteers who, for the past 31 years, have helped to stage the open Sunday events.

The 12 individual caves play a special role in Wemyss's culture. The name of the nearby town, East Wemyss, comes from the old Scots word "weem", meaning cave. The significance of the caves was underlined in 2004, when a "Time

Team" documentary was filmed at the site. During that film, Douglas Speirs, the head archaeologist at Fife Council, said:

"The archaeological study of the internationally important Wemyss caves has the very real potential to revolutionise our understanding of the Pictish period. Something of extreme importance was happening at these caves during the Pictish period but only excavation can explain what this was."

Despite that, we are still very much in the dark when it comes to understanding the Pictish culture and way of life. However, the caves hold great significance, because they represent the drawings and feelings of ordinary Picts who were not among the elite classes. Deciphering of those symbols could unlock the mystery of those early Scots.

Because of the caves' national importance, more needs to be done to secure their long-term sustainability. As has been mentioned—it was also mentioned in the documentary to which I referred—coastal erosion threatens their existence. Although the option of erecting coastal defences was ruled out several years ago, partly due to cost, technology has improved in the meantime and such an approach could be feasible in the future.

A briefing from the Scotland's coastal heritage at risk project demonstrates the pressing danger of natural erosion. It will be difficult to stop erosion, but contingency plans must be drawn up to save the cave drawings if natural forces cannot be turned back.

I echo the call that David Torrance made regarding the feasibility of a visitor and heritage centre.

A Fife coastal path report of 2007 estimated the annual number of path visits to be between 480,000 and 580,000, generating between £8 million and £10 million for the local economy. A visitor centre could profit from that footfall and generate funds that could be used to preserve the caves. The financial benefits that a visitor centre could bring to the local economy would also be significant.

To that end, I encourage the Scottish Government to engage with the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society and to consider the feasibility of creating a visitor centre that could act as a focal point for the caves. It would also, of course, provide the area with a tangible economic legacy.

I hope that we will hear positive things from the minister in response to the debate.

17:27

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** As a fellow Fife MSP, I congratulate David

Torrance on bringing the debate to Parliament and highlighting the work of the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society.

I welcome Mike McFarlane and his volunteers and friends, who are in the gallery.

I understand that the society has been working hard since 1986 to promote and protect the caves and their unique heritage. That heritage first captured significant academic interest in the mid-19th century, when Sir James Young Simpson—who was renowned for his contribution to anaesthesia—visited the caves in 1865 and recorded the carvings inside. Since then, academic interest has flourished.

Local historian Frank Rankin has written extensively about the caves, and his booklet “The Wemyss Caves” is popular with visitors and enthusiasts alike.

As well as the expected interest from academia, the caves have captured the imagination of Kirkcaldy-born crime author Val McDermid, who used the caves as part of the setting of her novel “A Darker Domain”. I have not read the book, but I understand that it is a gripping novel of its type.

As Murdo Fraser already said, United Kingdom-wide attention was brought to the caves in the summer of 2004 when “Time Team” visited them. The visit was an all-round success, because the team discovered the holy well in the wells cave, which was used by medieval pilgrims.

The excavations unearthed deeply stratified archaeological deposits inside the caves, providing evidence of many centuries of occupation. Layers in the sliding, or sloping, cave showed evidence of occupation as long ago as the fourth century AD by the Picts, and provided further evidence of activity during the medieval period by Christian hermits and pilgrims.

The society has worked hard since its inception to ensure the preservation of that historically distinctive setting. The caves are an important and valuable part of Fife’s and Scotland’s history, so it would be a great shame not to take steps to preserve such an important piece of our heritage from the effects of coastal erosion, landslips and human interference, as David Torrance and Claire Baker outlined.

The caves are at the mercy of the elements, but on a more positive note, the society has worked hard to gain funding so that all visitors can enjoy the unique opportunity to view a special part of our nation’s history. That paid off when the society received £25,000 for a new access path to the caves to ensure safer access.

A principal aim of the society is to work hard to obtain funding for a purpose-built visitor and learning centre, as the current museum is less

than ideal for its purposes and access to the Wemyss environmental education centre is limited. More important is that there is no appropriate access to the facilities for individuals who have disabilities. The society wishes to offer all individuals, as far as that is possible, the opportunity to explore and learn more about a fascinating part of our history. Any financial cost of preserving and promoting the caves would undoubtedly be dwarfed by the cultural and educational gains that we would receive from such an undertaking. I commend the society’s efforts in that respect, and David Torrance has outlined a lot of the efforts that are being made to raise funding.

We certainly need to take more steps to protect and preserve the unique site. We need to ensure that the caves are marketed as a historical highlight on the Fife coastal path, as Murdo Fraser mentioned. The walk is already incredibly popular with visitors from far and near.

The history of Scotland is an important aspect of tourism here generally, and it plays a key role in supporting the economy at local and national levels. The caves were already a historical jewel in Fife’s crown, so we could and should do more to invest in their future.

It is not only the economy that could benefit from the caves, because they offer a unique insight into the past and provide opportunities for learning at all stages across Scotland.

I wish the society the best of luck for the future. I hope that tonight’s debate has helped to raise the profile of its work and of the caves themselves. I am pleased to support David Torrance in bringing such an important part of Fife’s history for debate today.

17:31

**The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf):** I congratulate David Torrance on securing the debate and bringing it to the chamber. I also welcome members of the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society, who have come in great numbers. I also pass on an apology from the cabinet secretary, Fiona Hyslop, who is on Government business in Germany. She asked me to respond to the debate on the member’s motion and I know that she would have welcomed the chance to recognise the good work of the society.

Scotland’s local historical and archaeological societies make a substantial contribution to protecting and managing our historical environment. Indeed, the best and sometimes the only way to get involved with archaeology and history is through the local societies. They arrange talks, walks, guides and events nearly every week in Scotland, and they do much to provide



opportunities for us all to use, enjoy and understand our cultural heritage. On the Scottish Government's behalf, therefore, I am happy to recognise the work of the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society. As many members have commented, since 1986 the society has done so much to promote public understanding, awareness and enjoyment of the Wemyss area and the caves in particular.

I also put on the record our understanding of the national significance of the caves. They are a scheduled site and, as such, their national significance should not be underplayed, although I agree entirely with Murdo Fraser's comment that perhaps many people in Scotland do not know enough about them. Hopefully, tonight's debate, secured by David Torrance, will help to raise that awareness.

The society's work typifies the passion, commitment, hard work and enthusiasm that we see in many local archaeological and historical societies across Scotland. I am aware of some of the guide books that it has produced for the caves and of the walks that it leads year after year to show local people and visitors the rich heritage of the area. I am sure that we all recognise that that work is given freely on weekends and after work by people who are balancing family life and commitments with the wider benefits to the community. I am also sure that those people will not mind me saying that having looked at the work that they have done since 1986, I believe that it is fair to say that the society is tenacious—and I mean that in the most complimentary way possible.

The society's work shows us why it is vital that we recognise and empower local groups and communities to continue to be involved in managing and promoting our archaeological sites. To that end, the Government supports the work of Archaeology Scotland, which helps people from all walks of life to get involved with archaeology through learning about and promotion and support of Scotland's unique historic environment. Many members will be aware of the great work that is done through the Scottish archaeology month each September.

We recognise the fact that local communities face difficulties in protecting and understanding archaeological remains in coastal areas. As Claire Baker mentioned, we fund the work of the SCAPE trust to provide a national approach on the issue. SCAPE—a charity based at the University of St Andrews—undertakes national monitoring programmes and archaeological investigations of key monuments that are affected by coastal erosion. The charity is focused on engaging with coastal communities to complete those programmes.

Using technologies such as phone apps, Scotland's coastal heritage at risk project, which was developed by SCAPE, provides information for local communities to use to monitor and record sites at risk. I am glad that one of SCAPE's projects is at the Wemyss caves, where it is working with the society and with university researchers to laser scan the sites.

I know that David Torrance supports that recording project and I am also aware that he and other members feel strongly about the physical protection of the caves. The caves have suffered from vandalism, as we have heard, as well as from the presence and long-term effects of mining and from coastal erosion of the sites and paths. Each of those issues requires different approaches for the long-term management of the caves.

The archaeological heritage of Fife is rich and varied, especially in the coastal areas. The national significance of the Wemyss caves is acknowledged by the scheduled monument status of six of the 12 caves. That designation allows Scottish ministers to provide support and advice to owners and to others who seek to undertake positive works.

The Scottish Government recognises the strength of local feeling and commitment to the protection of the caves. We also acknowledge that the management problems have been significant and complex, with no practical and necessarily cost-effective solution to date.

Existing coastal defences, which were funded by central and local government in the 1990s, had some effect but did not by any means present a permanent solution. Members have quite rightly asked about Scottish Government actions and about what assistance we can provide. Accordingly, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Ms Hyslop, has asked Historic Scotland to set up a working group to review the situation since the 1990s and to look at the management issues and the options moving forward. Ms Hyslop has written to Fife Council to seek its participation in the group and I am glad to note that it has accepted.

Key to the success of that group, of course, is the participation, support and knowledge of the society, the local community and the owners—Wemyss estate. I am glad to note that SCAPE will provide its expertise on the group as well. I am told that the group will meet for the first time in the next few weeks, when a suitable date for all has been confirmed. I understand that the cabinet secretary intends to visit the site in late summer to review the group's progress.

The group will look at the erosion effects and mitigation options; the aim is also to review the full range of issues affecting the site such as access,

interpretation and visitor amenities. Ultimately, the aim is to provide a framework for future management of the site that is agreed by all parties—a point well made by Murdo Fraser. I agree that visitor numbers are important for sustainability and a visitor strategy will be part of the discussions of the working group when it meets.

Quite rightly, there are concerns about archaeological sites being lost through coastal erosion. As we have heard, climate change is having an increasingly negative impact on our environment, including the historic environment, with rising sea levels and increased storm events causing more attrition of archaeological sites each year. Perhaps the work of the working group will serve to benefit not just the Wemyss caves but many sites around our coastal area.

The key to good management of this resource is the integrated work of all parts of the historic environment sector to allow long-term planning and concerted action at the right time. The Government will continue to support the work of local groups such as the society, public authorities, local communities and research institutions to value and manage our coastal and maritime heritage.

I thank David Torrance for securing the debate and for raising awareness of the issue. I also thank him for organising the attendance of the society today. I thank the society for its work since 1986. Its input to the working group will be extraordinarily helpful, not just for the Wemyss caves but for many historical sites across Scotland.

*Meeting closed at 17:39.*

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

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