



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 22 May 2013

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Lifelong Learning

Gaelic Further and Higher Education

1. Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it supports Gaelic further and higher education. (S4O-02135)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting all levels of Gaelic education. We understand the value that the further and higher education sectors bring to Gaelic. We are working closely with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council and those sectors to deliver high-quality courses, including in areas such as teacher training and research, which benefit the whole of Scotland.

Dave Thompson: The minister will know that Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has been a great success since it was founded 40 years ago. The latest development of the Gaelic college in a new village at Kilbeg, with substantial funding from the Scottish Government, will continue that progress, and confirms the Government's support for Gaelic.

Does the minister agree that the case for Gaelic further and higher education is now indisputable? Will he continue to support Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, which is the jewel in the crown of Gaelic education?

Dr Allan: I agree with the member wholeheartedly. I agree not just about Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, but about the recent development there; I recognise the value of that development at Kilbeg.

The Government also recognises the role that the European regional development fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the funding council and Highland Council have had in ensuring that that success has come to pass.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can the minister tell us how many Gaelic-medium teacher training places will be available for session 2013-14?

Dr Allan: An additional 20 places are hoped for for session 2013-14. The number of Gaelic-medium-qualified teachers who have been coming

through this year has been higher than in previous years. I will get the figures to Liz Smith in writing.

HMYOI Polmont (Education Provision)

2. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what additional support it will provide to HMYOI Polmont and Education Scotland, following the decision to increase access, quality and consistency of teaching for inmates as a result of the report on HMYOI Polmont in February 2013. (S4O-02136)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The Scottish Prison Service has already committed substantial resources to supporting the young people in HMYOI Polmont. In partnership with Education Scotland, the SPS is now working to ensure that those resources are being invested appropriately to support the changes that are needed to create the skills development and learning environment that is envisaged in the recent report by HM inspectorate of prisons for Scotland.

However, further funding has also been made available for additional posts in Polmont, including a project manager to work with both Polmont and Education Scotland to manage delivery of that ground-breaking work.

Anne McTaggart: I was encouraged to learn that, on 8 May, Education Scotland and the Scottish Prison Service met various organisations, including colleges of further education, to discuss the process that will enable HMYOI Polmont to provide a secure and effective learning environment. What tangible steps have been taken to implement that new initiative, and what difference should the current young offenders be able to identify in the quality and scope of their education?

Dr Allan: As Anne McTaggart mentioned, on 8 May Education Scotland held a workshop on the issues. On tangible benefits, Carnegie College continues to review and expand its on-going contract with Polmont. I hope that the current review of the curriculum that is on offer in the prison will ensure that we pick up issues around numeracy and literacy early, which are crucial to ensuring the life chances of prisoners when they come out of prison.

Further Education (Support for Over-25s)

3. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to encourage over-25s who are unemployed to pursue further education. (S4O-02137)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Our

commitment to a consistent level in college funding of £522 million a year this year and next year makes clear our commitment to learners. The current economic circumstances mean that it is right to ask colleges to prioritise young people. However, colleges offer very valuable support to older learners—some 21 million hours of learning in 2011-12. In recognition of the important role that they play, our additional funding for next year includes a further £6.6 million for additional learner places and £1.9 million for additional childcare support.

Colin Beattie: Will the cabinet secretary join me in welcoming the latest employment statistics, which show headline employment rising by 54,000 in the three-month period January to March 2013? Does he believe that the biggest risk to rising employment is Westminster?

Michael Russell: Westminster—[*Interruption*]—or, as a member of the Opposition has just called it, “Westmonster”, which is an interesting way of looking at it, is a considerable problem, so the right way for Scotland to move forward is as an independent country that will be able to offer a consistent and considerable set of opportunities to older and younger learners.

It is vital that the college sector continue to ensure that its offerings are wide and widely accessible. The changes that are taking place through the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill will also guarantee that.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): One of the ways to help over-25s who are out of work is through adult learning. Has the Scottish Government joined every country in sub-Saharan Africa in signing up to the “International Adult Learners’ Charter” and, if not, why not?

Michael Russell: No matter what the Scottish Government did, there would be something that it was not doing that Mr Findlay would regard as being near fatal.

I am absolutely certain that the Scottish Government’s record on adult learning is good and consistent. No matter what Mr Findlay waves around, no matter what he finds to criticise, and no matter his inability to work with others, the reality is that in adult learning, college learning, university learning and school learning the Government is delivering good education in Scotland, as opposed to what Mr Findlay, who is delivering only constant oppositionalism, is doing.

Curriculum for Excellence (Societal Change)

4. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): To ask the Scottish Government what flexibility there is in the curriculum for excellence to reflect evolving situations in society. (S4O-02138)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):

There are provisions within the range of experiences and outcomes that take account of and actively promote the study of changing society at a range of macro and micro levels nationally and internationally. That is one of the ways in which the new curriculum is responsive to change.

John Finnie: The Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee will shortly scrutinise the proposed same-sex marriage legislation. What assurances can the minister give that that issue will be dealt with in an age-appropriate and non-partisan way in Scotland’s schools?

Dr Allan: Teachers already have an obligation to deal with such sensitive issues in a way that entirely respects an equalities agenda and uses age-appropriate material. I have no doubt that the profession will continue to act with that good sense.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Question 5 from Mark McDonald has not been lodged. We can all understand why.

Question 6 from Richard Simpson has also not been lodged. Similarly, we can understand why and an explanation has been provided.

Further Education Students with Learning Difficulties (Employment)

7. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many further education students with learning difficulties have taken up supported employment after completing their courses, in each of the last three years. (S4O-02141)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Information on leaver destinations of further education students is not currently collected. However, we want to ensure that, with the right support, disabled people are able to find fulfilling jobs that are suitable to their skills and experience.

We are currently working with the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability and Enable to develop a programme to build on the success of their project search and their transitions into employment programmes to increase the number of students with learning disabilities who move from our colleges into employment by 200 per year.

We are also working closely with local authorities and the Scottish Union of Supported Employment to promote supported employment opportunities, where disabled people can learn on the job with support from colleagues and a job coach.

John Pentland: I thank the cabinet secretary for that “kind of” answer. Again, he failed to answer the question with any figures.

Will the learning disability strategy—the launch of which I understand has now been put back a couple of weeks until 13 June—make more supported employment available for people with learning disabilities after they leave college? Will there be measures in the strategy to address that?

Michael Russell: As I said to John Pentland, we are currently working with the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability and Enable to develop a programme to build on the success of their project search and their transition to employment programmes in order to increase by 200 a year the number of students with learning disabilities who move from colleges into employment. There is a number attached to that; there are existing projects attached to that and there are bodies attached to that.

I have met representatives of those bodies on two occasions recently, and I continue to meet them regularly and to talk to them about what more we can do to support their work. That is a positive set of discussions. I have been to the cross-party group on learning disability and I have had conversations with its members to ensure that there is satisfaction about what is taking place.

If John Pentland wishes to see me about the matter, we can have conversations, too. All the things that I mentioned are actually happening.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary outline how the recently launched certificate of work readiness will help more young people into employment?

Michael Russell: The certificate of work readiness is a very positive step forward. It is an employer-assessed work-based qualification to help young people to prove that they are ready for work. That includes young people such as the 17-year-old Fife teenager Nico Hutchison who, after completing the certificate for work readiness with a local electronics firm, secured a two-year apprenticeship with the company.

Numerous employer surveys show that one of the biggest barriers that face young people in today's challenging labour market is lack of experience. With its employer-assessed work-experience placement, the certificate is a meaningful qualification, which employers recognise and trust. Successful completion gives young people the chance to prove that they have the skills and experience that employers want. That is a very useful and positive step forward, not just for the system but for each young person who is involved.

National Qualifications for English (Scottish Texts)

8. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what criteria are used when selecting set Scottish texts for the new national qualifications for English. (S4O-02142)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Responsibility for the development of the new qualifications, including the implementation of a specific element on Scottish texts in the English courses, lies with the Scottish Qualifications Authority. In determining the list of set Scottish texts, the SQA took account of the extensive feedback that had been received through engagement with teachers and lecturers, as well as other stakeholder groups. A central consideration was the suitability of texts for assessment purposes. Further consideration was given to ensuring that Scotland's rich culture and heritage, a range of geographical locations and time periods, and a breadth of themes were represented.

Kenneth Gibson: In the past, higher English texts included such classics as “Ivanhoe” by Sir Walter Scott, “The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie” by Muriel Spark and Robert Louis Stevenson's “The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde”. Are there any plans to broaden the choice of texts to include such works, which although they are challenging were once commonly used in our schools?

Dr Allan: I should perhaps first say that, despite some press speculation, I did not set the exam questions personally. The SQA does that, for good reasons.

Kenneth Gibson mentioned Robert Louis Stevenson, who is, in fact, on the list of set texts, albeit not with “The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde”.

It is important to say that we are talking about one question in the new exams. The option exists for people to answer any of the other questions—for the critical essay, for instance, or for internal assessment—on any text, be it a Scottish text or a text from anywhere around the world. There is certainly the opportunity, if teachers are willing, to teach and examine the texts to which Kenneth Gibson refers.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Can the minister explain why the specified text has been reintroduced, despite its having been previously discarded for offering too narrow an assessment?

Dr Allan: The specified text is being introduced in the exam papers first because the Scottish studies working group thought that it was rather

unusual that any country would think it normal for its national literature not to feature, as a matter of course, in a literature exam—as it does in Wales, in Ireland, in America and, by default, because it does not need to be specified, in England. With advice from people such as the national makar—our national poet—and many others, that was felt to be an uncontroversial thing to do, except in some paranoid circles.

Educational Psychologists (Workforce Planning)

9. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made with the educational psychologists workforce planning group. (S4O-02143)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The educational psychologists workforce planning group met on 8 March this year, following a meeting on 25 October 2012. We are currently working with the group to monitor the impact of the changes in funding arrangements for the training of educational psychologists in Scotland.

The group has worked to revise its terms of reference and will meet again on 12 September. Full minutes and agendas can be provided to Claire Baker and to others who are interested.

Claire Baker: In evidence to the Education and Culture Committee yesterday, Carolyn Brown from the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists described significant cuts in educational psychologists in the past three years as taking us “back to square 1”. Under previous Administrations, we saw an increase, but under this Government we have seen a decline. Is the cabinet secretary satisfied that the current number of educational psychologists is sufficient to meet demand, considering that we are now practically back to the staffing levels of 2001, when the Currie report was published?

Michael Russell: There is no end to the spending demands of the Labour Opposition. In addition to that demand today, yesterday Mr Findlay was calling for free entry to Our Dynamic Earth. There is nothing that it will not demand of this Administration.

Of course there are restrictions on public finance and they will have some effect, but there is a new agreed funding position with the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, whereby students are eligible to apply for the £3,400 postgraduate tuition-fee loan for each of the two years, which they will not start repaying until they are in employment and earning over a threshold. An alternative funding mechanism is the professional career development loan, which is a deferred-payment bank loan to help to pay for vocational

training that leads to employment in the United Kingdom and European Union. The loan can cover up to two years of learning and can be between £300 and £10,000. Students have to start paying that money back once they finish their courses.

Of course there are difficulties within the current public finances. If Claire Baker really wishes to make a difference to that, I commend to her support for independence, when all the resources of Scotland will be available to the people of Scotland. That is the way forward.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Presiding Officer, I wonder whether you can give me some guidance on ministers' answers to questions. In one answer, the cabinet secretary has deliberately misled the Parliament twice. One was—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I take it that this is a point of order, then.

Neil Findlay: Yes. Well—it is a point of order, or whatever way you want to take it, Presiding Officer.

First, I did not say yesterday what the cabinet secretary suggested. I hope that he will withdraw what he alleged that I said.

Secondly, the point that Claire Baker mentioned was made in evidence to the Education and Culture Committee yesterday. Maybe the cabinet secretary will reflect on that as well, and apologise to Ms Baker.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was not a point of order because—as you well know by now—questions to and answers from Government ministers are a matter for them. We will move on to question 10.

Vulnerable Children and Families (Support)

10. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it seeks to support vulnerable children and their families. (S4O-02144)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be the best place in which to grow up for all Scotland's children and young people. We have a range of measures in place to take that ambitious vision forward and they are underpinned by the getting it right for every child—GIRFEC—approach, which has been in place since 2004. It puts the child at the centre of services and focuses on improving their life through appropriate, proportionate and timely measures. Our recently published Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill will underpin new ways of working and embed key elements of the GIRFEC approach in law.

The Scottish Government wants to ensure that no parent or family ever feels isolated and that people can access information, advice and support whenever they are needed. Last year, we published Scotland's first national parenting strategy to ensure that parents get the support that they need when they need it. That is supported by an £18 million investment to create high-quality, co-ordinated and accessible family support.

Bob Doris: I thank the minister for that detailed answer. Yesterday, I met families from across Scotland who are benefiting from the Family Fund's take a break initiative, which gives the families of disabled youngsters financial assistance to plan a holiday of their choice, which under-pressure families greatly value. The Scottish Government's support for that initiative is welcome. Will the minister confirm that the fund includes support for families of disabled young people over the age of 18? Will he continue to work constructively with the Family Fund to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet the needs of families of young people over the age of 18?

Aileen Campbell: The member makes a good point. We acknowledge the importance of supporting young people in that way. That is why the Scottish Government has put £30 million into the voluntary sector for short breaks over the period 2010 to 2015. Of that, £8 million is directed towards supporting disabled children and young people and their parent carers, and that investment is administered through two funding programmes.

Shared Care Scotland administers £1.3 million per year through the better breaks programme and the Family Fund administers £700,000 per year through the take a break programme. Both offer creative short-break opportunities for disabled young people and both encompass young people up to the age of 20. I know that the member will be reassured by that.

If groups want to re-examine the age limits, it is entirely appropriate for them to do so and they should discuss that with the Scottish Government. Of course, we will always aim to continue constructive dialogue with whichever groups are supporting vulnerable young people.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On supporting vulnerable children, what is the minister's view of the reduction in classroom assistants in our schools? What impact will that reduction have on vulnerable children?

Aileen Campbell: As I outlined, we have structures in place—we have getting it right for every child—and our whole approach in the Government is to ensure that children who need help and support get that help and support in a timely way. The Government is motivated by that;

it is a pity that perhaps the member does not take cognisance of that and instead wants to snipe from the sidelines.

Nursery Places (Partnership Funding)

11. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what guidance it provides to local authorities in relation to providing partnership funding for nursery places. (S4O-02145)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government does not currently provide guidance on that. It is for local authorities to decide an appropriate level to pay partner providers. The key priority is to secure high-quality early learning and childcare for children.

New statutory guidance will be published to support the implementation of the early learning and childcare proposals in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. A sub-group of the early years task force has been established to draft that guidance. The group includes representatives of private and third sector partner providers, including the National Day Nurseries Association, the Care and Learning Alliance and Parenting across Scotland, which supports parents and represents parents' issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Aileen Campbell. I am sorry—I mean Roderick Campbell. Forgive me.

Roderick Campbell: Many parents in my constituency have raised concerns that they cannot send their children to their preferred nursery because of a lack of partnership-funded places, and they dispute the local authority's claim that there are sufficient places in its nurseries in the area. I welcome the minister's comments, however. Does she agree that parental choice remains fundamental and that local authorities should take account of that and ensure that sufficient partnership-funded places are available in local nurseries?

Aileen Campbell: Yes, and I take on board what Rod Campbell—no relation—has stated. If he so wishes, I am happy to meet him to explain some of the proposals in the bill. I agree that parental choice is important. That is why we are introducing more flexibility through the bill's early learning and childcare proposals.

It is for local authorities to secure sufficient provision through their own services and through partner providers. The bill will introduce a requirement on local authorities to consult locally representative populations of parents with children who are under school age in order to identify patterns of hours that best suit parental needs and to respond to those views through local plans to

reconfigure services to meet those needs. That is why the bill is so important. It is about giving parents flexibility and meeting children's developmental needs.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Government gives an assurance that the pre-school education grant will continue to be given for early learning. Will grants for childcare be funded in addition to the pre-school education grant?

Aileen Campbell: I am happy to meet any member who wants to raise issues about specific elements in the bill. We seek to deliver something that is meaningful for all children and young people. We are particularly interested in early years childcare issues and we want the bill to deliver on meeting the developmental needs of children in Scotland. If Neil Bibby wants to meet to discuss some of those issues, I am more than happy to talk through some of the details with him.

National Qualifications (New Materials for Teachers)

12. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether concerns have been expressed about the new materials that have been provided to teachers to support the new national qualifications. (S4O-02146)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): Education Scotland worked closely with directors of education and others to develop a strong, comprehensive package of course materials for all 95 national 4 and national 5 courses. More than 15,000 practitioners have accessed the materials to date. Thus far, the total number of teachers who have expressed any concerns over the content to Education Scotland is two.

The course materials are exemplars. The flexibility of curriculum for excellence means that there is no one set course. Teachers are free to use the materials, draw from them and adapt them for their local contexts or to develop their own courses.

Neil Findlay: At briefings with ministers and civil servants, we were assured that all teachers now had well-developed resources and materials and that they were all tooled up for teaching all phases of the curriculum. However, we have reports from teaching unions and others that in some subjects, such as maths and the sciences, teachers are complaining that what they have received is unsatisfactory. What is the Scottish Government doing to speak to teachers and the teaching unions about those concerns?

Dr Allan: The Government takes seriously the need to engage with teachers and we recognise the need for teachers to be satisfied with the

materials that they have. Overall, the Educational Institute of Scotland welcomed the issuing of materials and in particular the distribution of final assessment support papers on 30 April.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority has produced sample exam papers in addition to Education Scotland's professional focus papers. There have been 150 events around the country at which Education Scotland and other agencies have sought teachers' views, and the Government and Education Scotland always stand ready to ensure that teachers are satisfied with the new exams.

I stress that the materials that are being provided are exemplars. One purpose of curriculum for excellence is to allow teachers the freedom to teach in the way that they believe is best fitted to achieving the aims that we all share.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Will the minister join me in welcoming the comments from former Her Majesty's senior chief inspector Graham Donaldson? He told *The Times Educational Supplement Scotland* that

"We in Scotland are in a strong position internationally—Curriculum for Excellence, I'm quite clear, is the right agenda".

Dr Allan: I certainly welcome those comments and the fact that there is international interest in curriculum for excellence and in what is happening in Scotland's schools. I feel that curriculum for excellence is now becoming what happens in Scotland's schools; it is no longer merely a theory, and we can all do a great deal to work together to ensure that further positive interest is taken—both nationally and internationally—in what we are doing.

All-weather Outdoor Sports Facilities (Secondary Schools)

13. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the provision of outdoor sports facilities with all-weather surfaces in the grounds of secondary schools. (S4O-02147)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 prescribe a minimum area of playing fields that local authorities must provide at a secondary school, which depends on the number of pupils. Although I understand the benefits that all-weather surfaces can provide, it is for local authorities to decide whether to provide all-weather surfaces as part of playing fields.

Bill Kidd: Does the minister agree that the lack of all-weather surfaces at all three local authority

secondary schools in my Glasgow Anniesland constituency—Knightswood secondary, St Thomas Aquinas and Drumchapel high—although two of those schools were built under the previous Administration's private finance initiative and public-private partnership system is an outdated scenario for our young people to be landed with? Will he suggest how the situation might be addressed to improve that scenario?

Dr Allan: Bill Kidd will appreciate that I cannot speak for the local authority, and I am unaware of the precise condition of the provision of all-weather surfaces at those schools. Having said that, the Government and sportscotland have been active nationally in those areas. Sportscotland is providing local authorities that have committed to delivering the physical education target with a share of an additional £3.4 million over 2012-13 and 2013-14 to invest in physical education more generally.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 14, in the name of Liam McArthur, and question 15, in the name of Joan McAlpine, have not been lodged, but explanations have been provided.

Zero-hours Contracts (16 to 24-year-olds)

16. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many more 16 to 24-year-olds are employed on zero-hours contracts than in 2007. (S4O-02150)

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): The Office for National Statistics does not publish information on the number of 16 to 24-year-olds on zero-hours contracts in Scotland. However, last week's labour market figures show yet again that Scotland has lower unemployment and higher employment rates among our young people in comparison with the United Kingdom.

We remain resolute in our efforts to reduce youth unemployment even further, and the action that we are taking to support young people in employment is making a difference. Our investments in 25,000 modern apprenticeships a year and more than 3,000 community jobs Scotland placements to date, and a £25 million investment to support employer recruitment incentives throughout Scotland this year, are all contributing to quality job opportunities for young people.

Iain Gray: Presumably, the minister will be aware that the ONS has reported that, for the UK, the number of 16 to 24-year-olds on zero-hours contracts has doubled since the economic downturn. That increase is likely, to some degree at least, to be reflected here in Scotland. I hope that the minister agrees with me that unstable, insecure employment of that kind, especially for

young people, amounts to little more than exploitation.

I understand that employment law is reserved, but I am interested not in what could be done if that were to change but in what could be done now to address the position. Will the Scottish Government use its significant power as a purchaser of goods and services to turn down bids that propose to use zero-hours contracts, as was recommended last week by the Scotland Institute?

Angela Constance: Let me reassure Mr Gray that, in all our endeavours to boost youth employment, we are seeking to create substantial and sustainable employment opportunities for young people. To give one example, 79 per cent of those who complete modern apprenticeships secure full-time employment. I take the point that has been made about zero-hours contracts. Although some people will choose to undertake zero-hours contracts because they want and need that flexibility for their life circumstances, I also accept that zero-hours contracts are part of a wider problem of underemployment in Scotland. We know that young people are hit the hardest by unemployment and underemployment.

I take exception to what Mr Gray says about employment powers. I think that it is highly pertinent to the debate what we could do if we had powers over employment law, which would also mean that our debate on the issue would be a little less theoretical.

Iain Gray: Is Ms Constance saying that the Scottish National Party's position is that, given control over employment law, it would ban zero-hours contracts, as the Labour Party leader Mr Miliband has committed to do? [*Iain Gray has corrected his contribution. See end of report.*]

Angela Constance: No, what I am saying—[*Interruption.*] Presiding Officer, I am trying to explain exactly what I said, despite being rather rudely heckled.

What I am saying is that it would be more pertinent if this Parliament had employment law within its remit, and I have argued for that pretty much all my political life. I think that Mr Gray is being rather disingenuous. We will lay out in full what we would like to do with employment law, but I think that it is important that employment law should come within the province of this Parliament. We will not get even the choice or opportunity to shape employment law in the way that we would wish without that power. In that sense, Mr Gray's questions are rather theoretical. Let us not put the horse before the cart but have employment law devolved to this Parliament instead of leaving it abandoned to Westminster.

I have no doubts that there are problems with zero-hours contracts and that those are part of a

wider problem to do with underemployment. This Parliament and Government are also focused on doing what we can to resolve that issue using the powers that we have.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Will the minister join me in welcoming the fact that youth unemployment has fallen by 27,000 over the past year and has remained lower in Scotland than in the UK? Does she agree that there is evidence that the Scottish Government's action on youth unemployment is having an impact?

Angela Constance: I think that our distinctive policies and approach in Scotland are having some positive outcomes. Our approach includes an unrelenting focus on tackling youth unemployment, which I think is shared across Parliament and, arguably, across Scotland, given that Scottish employers are more likely to employ young people under 25 than companies elsewhere in the UK are. Policies such as our modern apprenticeship programme are leading to sustainable employment—and to full-time employment at that.

Our policies on paid internships have resulted in very good outcomes for graduates, with 70 per cent of the 800 graduates who have participated in Government-funded schemes going into employment. It is important that we get more of our graduates into graduate-level employment, because that will help to address underemployment. That is something that we are doing now with the limited powers that we have.

Supply Teachers (Recruitment Problems)

17. Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government for what reasons schools continue to report problems in the recruitment of supply teachers. (S4O-02151)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Local authorities have historically reported varying degrees of difficulty in engaging supply teachers. As Mr Henry knows, the degree of difficulty varies geographically across Scotland and across the range of secondary subjects and fluctuates throughout the year. The Scottish negotiating committee for teachers has undertaken three surveys over the past 18 months to establish the level of difficulty and any reasons for it. The surveys have identified a number of possible issues, which include the changes to the salary scale and the fact that teacher unemployment is lower in Scotland than it is anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government is working with partners through the SNCT to identify and implement solutions.

Hugh Henry: The cabinet secretary refers to historical problems, but in recent years the problem has been exacerbated by the salaries that are on offer to supply teachers. The problems exist across Scotland and are not confined to specific geographic areas. Councils and teachers know that there is a problem; indeed, teachers are refusing to work on the current salaries that are on offer. Will the Scottish Government therefore provide extra funding to councils to ensure that the present failing arrangement is scrapped and a fairer and more attractive scheme is introduced?

Michael Russell: I accept Mr Henry's point that further progress is needed, but there is a complex series of issues. Mr Henry is aware that the payment for supply teachers was agreed as part of the tripartite agreement two years ago, which was accepted by the trade unions. All three parties to the agreement accepted those changes.

Teacher unemployment is at its lowest level for a very long time and is the lowest in these islands. Mr Henry shakes his head as if to say that that does not matter, but of course it matters because, for a long time, we have been trying to drive down teacher unemployment. We have succeeded in doing so, but sometimes that creates a problem in some areas.

A third issue is that, in the present on-going discussions, there is a discussion about supply. However, the local authorities have to prove themselves willing to come to the table along with others to ensure that the issue is solved. If Mr Henry has any influence with any local authority education leader—I believe that he does—I hope that he will influence that leader or leaders to ensure that they come to the table to be genuine in the discussions, along with the Government and the unions. We can then get a resolution of the issue. It is important that we try to make progress on the issue. There is a complex series of reasons and the situation is not the same everywhere. We are trying to ensure that solutions are found.

Oil and Gas Sector Skills (International Students)

18. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with universities and colleges regarding demand from international students for courses that develop skills for the oil and gas sector. (S4O-02152)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The oil and gas sector is a hugely important industry for Scotland, and our universities and colleges provide world-class education and training in Scotland and internationally. We recently provided £1.7 million through our energy skills Scotland

funding to support the establishment of the oil and gas academy of Scotland, which is a collaboration—initially between Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen College, the University of Aberdeen and Banff and Buchan College—to share resources and facilities to ensure that maximum provision is available to the oil and gas industry.

I am aware of the concerns that have been raised by the principals of the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen College about the impact of the United Kingdom Government's student migration policy on those institutions' ability to recruit international students to their oil and gas courses. The principals wrote to me on the matter on 30 April. I share their strong concerns and, once again, I am taking them up with the Minister of State for Immigration.

Maureen Watt: I thank the cabinet secretary for that full answer. I, too, have received that letter and have written to the immigration minister. Given the excellent global reputation of those universities and colleges in relation to the oil and gas sector, which the minister highlighted, what can be done with the UK Border Agency to change those wrong-headed rules?

Michael Russell: The short answer is that we need independence. We need to have control of our migration and immigration policy. That would ensure that we set policy that was suitable for Scotland, not policy that was set for other places.

Our universities and colleges have a global reputation, but the most important thing is that we ensure that, apart from having a reputation for excellence, they have a reputation for welcoming overseas students. The problem is that the way in which the UK Government is handling this matter means that it is becoming unwelcoming in that regard, and we are losing students as a result. All university and college principals know that. We should be working together to change that situation, and the only proper way to do so is for the Scottish Parliament to have full control of the policy.

Haudagain Roundabout

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06657, in the name of Richard Baker, on immediate action at the Haudagain roundabout.

14:40

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased that we have been able to bring forward in Labour business the issue of tackling congestion at the Haudagain roundabout, because it is a vital transport priority for Aberdeen. We should all agree that, because Aberdeen is of critical importance to the wider Scottish economy, we must have a transport network that is fit for purpose for a city that is the energy capital of the United Kingdom and a global energy hub. The Scottish Government should certainly agree that that is the case, because its plans for separation—faltering and unpopular as they may be—are predicated on having a thriving oil and gas industry based in Aberdeen. Therefore, it is as surprising as it is frustrating that successive Scottish National Party ministers have failed to make the issue the priority that it needs to be.

The Haudagain roundabout rarely features in newspaper headlines without words such as “bottleneck”, “notorious” or “nightmare” attached to it, and with good reason. Day after day, rush hour after rush hour, motorists in Aberdeen have had to endure long delays at the Haudagain, which have sometimes doubled their journey times.

The problem is manifested not just in frustration for motorists—it comes at a cost to the north-east economy. In 2006, the Institute of Directors estimated that congestion at the Haudagain cost the Aberdeen economy between £15 million and £30 million each year. We can expect that estimate to be significantly higher today. That is why the issue was identified by Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce as a key priority for the organisation in its recent campaign on transport policy.

Our airport is particularly affected by congestion at the Haudagain and unacceptably long journey times into the city centre. We have seen significant growth in passenger numbers and flights, and significant investment by the airport's operators in its infrastructure, but the continuing congestion at the Haudagain is clearly a threat to the airport's laudable ambitions for growth.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I thank the member very much for taking an intervention on that point. Does he accept that the Aberdeen western peripheral route is of great significance to Aberdeen airport and that it will reduce congestion for most passengers travelling

to the airport on the A90, from the south of Aberdeen?

Richard Baker: Of course; I am happy to accept that point. We all agree on the importance of the AWPR but, through today's debate, we want to move the Haudagain roundabout up the agenda, because it, too, is crucial to improving access to the airport.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): What will happen to traffic to the airport if Mr Baker's request for immediate action is granted? If the Haudagain is redone, we will have chaos on the roads of Aberdeen.

Richard Baker: That is both a poor excuse and a gross misrepresentation of the issue. I will specifically address the ludicrous press release that Mr Stewart issued yesterday later in my speech. That will give him time to reflect on just how idiotic that contribution was.

It is vital to our business reputation that visitors can have ease of access to the city centre for the meetings that they are in Aberdeen to attend, but all too often they encounter long traffic jams at the Haudagain, with the result that their journey from the airport into town takes almost as long as their flight. Because of Aberdeen's importance to oil and gas and the wider energy industry, it receives thousands of business visitors each year. If Aberdeen is to secure its future as an energy hub and to have businesses that want to base their operations in the city, there has to be better access from the airport.

In 2005, the feasibility study into proposals for improvements at the Haudagain that was commissioned by the then Labour-led Scottish Executive was published, but when the SNP came to power the Haudagain was notable by its absence from the party's first infrastructure investment plan. That was despite the fact that in previous parliamentary sessions SNP members had lodged a number of motions calling for immediate action at the Haudagain, some of which were lodged as long as ago as 2005 and 2006 and included notable signatories such as Mr Swinney and Mr Neil, who, during his tenure as Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, failed to lift a finger to get on with work at the Haudagain.

Despite the SNP's calling for immediate action nearly 10 years ago, I note that when I lodged a question to ask Mr Brown for the latest timescale I was informed that work at the Haudagain would not begin until after the completion of the AWPR and would take nine months to complete. At the most ambitious end of the Scottish Government's timetable, it will be 2019 before work at the Haudagain is completed. We know now that when

SNP members call for immediate action, they mean action some time within the next 20 years.

At the heart of SNP ministers' appallingly sluggish approach to this transport policy has been their refusal to begin work at the roundabout before the AWPR's completion. Refusing to start work on the Haudagain before the bypass has been completed has allowed the protracted court process over the AWPR to lead to more years of delay on the Haudagain. That situation was entirely avoidable; indeed, before they were in government, SNP members specifically called for work on the Haudagain to take place before the AWPR's completion, not least because when the project is completed the Haudagain will be entirely on detrunked roads that are the responsibility not of Scottish ministers but of the local council and local council tax payers.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Richard Baker: I am sure that Mr Stewart will want to speak later, so he will have his chance then.

Despite the Scottish Government's verbal assurances that it will pay for the Haudagain after the new trunk road is completed, my understanding is that it has not entered into a legally binding obligation to do so. Although ministers should enter into such an obligation if they are to stick to their current plans, it would be far better for them to take the action that is called for in the motion and move forward immediately with the planned improvements.

Substantive work towards that goal can be achieved now. Kevin Stewart's comments in this morning's press display what I believe to be a wilful misrepresentation of the plan for improvements that has been put forward and, indeed, the plan that he voted for when he was on the council. Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that he did not understand what he was voting for. The plan falls some way short of the flyovers that the SNP proposed when in opposition, but because we believe that time is of the essence we accept that this is the plan that must proceed.

However, Kevin Stewart must be aware that no one is suggesting that the roundabout needs to be closed for the duration of this work, because the solution that he endorsed means that the work will not take place at the roundabout itself. As the appraisal under the Scottish transport appraisal guidance indicates, the main features of option 5—the plan that has been agreed—are the retention of the existing roundabout at Haudagain and a new dual carriageway link road connecting North Anderson Drive with Auchmill Road. That work will take place away from the roundabout itself. Of course, the plan for improvements

chosen by the SNP will involve rehousing some residents in Logie and other plans for regeneration in that area.

The council stands ready to move forward with this work now and to enable work to commence on the improvements well in advance of the Scottish Government's current plans.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I have been listening carefully to Mr Baker. Will he confirm whether Labour is committed to the construction of a third Don crossing any time in the near future?

Richard Baker: The member is aware that Aberdeen City Council proposes a third Don crossing. As I have said, the council stands ready to move forward with this work now and to enable work to commence on the improvements at the Haudagain well in advance of the Scottish Government's current plans.

With the right co-operation from ministers on issues such as compensation orders and with key decisions taken now, the relocation of residents that is required by the plan can take place at an appropriate and sensitive pace. Even the previous SNP council said in 2008 that that work could be done within three years. For the SNP to suggest that we can be a separate nation years before we can resolve the rehousing of residents who will be affected by the Haudagain improvements is patent nonsense.

Last week Barney Crockett, Labour's leader of the administration in Aberdeen City Council, announced that the city council was moving forward now with plans to link Dyce Drive to the A96 trunk road, with the improvements to be completed in 2015. That project will significantly improve surface access to the airport and to areas in the north of the city, where significant new office developments for businesses in Aberdeen are being developed.

Today, we call on the Scottish Government to show the same kind of initiative with the Haudagain roundabout and not to subject motorists and businesses in Aberdeen to more years of traffic congestion misery. We ask ministers to think again and work with the council to give the green light to this project and to take the actions required to get it under way.

If ministers fail to do that, that will mean not only years more of traffic jams, but years more of tens of millions of pounds of costs to our local economy and local businesses. That is entirely avoidable. Not acting now would mean that ministers would have failed to listen not only to the local councils, but to local businesses and local people. It is time for ministers and the SNP to listen and think again about their refusal to give the work at the Haudagain roundabout the priority that it needs, otherwise the charge will justly be levelled at the

SNP that Aberdeen is its forgotten city. Aberdeen deserves better than that. We all agree that the city is vital to the whole of the Scottish economy. That is why I ask members to support our call for immediate action at Haudagain.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the ongoing concerns expressed in the north east over the continuing chronic congestion at the junction of the A90 and A96 trunk roads at the Haudagain roundabout; believes that, as it is the energy capital of Europe, Aberdeen requires a more efficient and effective transport network; recognises the views expressed by local business organisations, Aberdeen airport and local authorities that the traffic problems at the roundabout are detrimental to the local economy and cost it in the region of £15 to £30 million a year; notes that, although a feasibility study on improvements at the roundabout was commissioned by the former Scottish Executive and that Scottish Transport appraisal guidance was published in 2008, under current Scottish Government plans, work on the improvements will not begin until 2018 at the earliest and the Scottish Government has given no formal assurance that it will carry out this work after the completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route, when the Haudagain junction is no longer a Scottish Government responsibility; congratulates Aberdeen City Council on its announcement that it is investing in a £5 million project to link Dyce Drive to the A96 trunk road, which will be completed in 2015 and significantly improve surface access to the airport; believes that the Scottish Government should show the same urgency with work at the Haudagain roundabout, and calls on ministers to commence significant work on the project immediately so that road users in the city do not have to wait until the end of the decade for these much-needed improvements at the roundabout to be completed.

14:50

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government recognises, of course, the important contribution that Aberdeen and the north-east make to our wider economy and that an effective transport network is vital to economic growth. It is a shame that we did not have that decades ago, when we should have had it. The AWPR and Balmedie to Tippierty project, improvements to the Haudagain roundabout and the new Inveramsay bridge on the A96 form a core part of our commitment to improving transport in the north-east, along with the proposals to dual the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness by 2030. We have stated on a number of occasions our commitment to funding the design and construction of the road improvement, which will include associated land and compensation costs for the delivery of the Haudagain scheme.

The resolution of the legal issues surrounding the AWPR has allowed us to progress without delay the procurement of a design consultant for the Haudagain improvement. Work has commenced on the design of the improvement with the appointment of Jacobs UK Ltd as

consultant. The design work is necessary, and it will ensure that construction of that much-needed project can begin immediately after the AWPR and Balmedie to Tippetty project is completed in 2018. It is worth reminding Richard Baker that both the north east of Scotland transport partnership—Nestrans—and the council have explicitly said on a number of occasions that the benefits of the Haudagain project will be realised only after the AWPR and the third Don crossing are complete. That has been repeated a number of times.

Richard Baker: So when Alex Neil and John Swinney specifically called for immediate action more than five years ago, they were wrong.

Keith Brown: Perhaps Richard Baker has forgotten that there has been a protracted legal challenge on the AWPR. Nestrans and the council that he has lauded have said a number of times that the Haudagain improvement will produce benefits only when the AWPR and the third Don crossing are complete. The simple fact is that Richard Baker did not answer that point; it would have been good if he had come back on it. Labour has had a conversion to the idea of supporting the third Don crossing, of course, which in itself is welcome.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No. I want to make some progress.

The funding of the regeneration proposal for the Middlefield area is a matter for Aberdeen City Council, but Transport Scotland and our consultants will work closely with the council to ensure that the programming of both projects is in tandem. As is the case with all our schemes, landowners, including the local authority, will be compensated for any land or property that is required to enable the construction of the road improvement.

We have said that we will look at opportunities for opening parts of the AWPR and Balmedie to Tippetty project as early as possible to maximise early benefit to the people in the north-east in advance of the full scheme opening in spring 2018. The airport has already been mentioned. That is one area that we have looked at to see whether there is a possibility of bringing forward that work. That has been discussed with the consultants and the council. Whether the Balmedie to Tippetty project can be brought forward has also been considered.

As I have said, the Haudagain improvement will work only following the predicted reduction in traffic volumes when the AWPR and the third Don crossing are operational. That and the associated disruption during construction is why the project

cannot commence now, and that has been made clear a number of times.

There is very little in Richard Baker's motion that calls for any action at all. If we want immediate construction action now, of course, it will have to be done in advance of any public inquiry or paying compensation to landowners. It seems to me that there is an incredible lack of knowledge about how the projects have progressed.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I will do so in just a second.

The forthcoming by-election and Labour's need for a fig leaf to hide every major construction project that it has delayed explain the motion better. The M74 was never completed, and excuses were made for that. The Borders rail line was not completed, and the Forth road project was known about for years, but Labour did nothing about that. An SNP Administration has been required to take forward those projects, as we will do with the Haudagain roundabout.

I give way to Lewis Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald: I am grateful to the minister for giving way, even if he has done so when I was not seeking to intervene.

Will the minister confirm that the STAG report actually says, on the connection between the Haudagain and the third Don crossing, that if the crossing is not built, the Persley bridge would require to be dualled by 2027 in order to have the same traffic impact? Does he not recognise that a good deal could be done, with or without the third Don crossing, before 2027 and that that is precisely what Labour is calling on him to do?

Keith Brown: I think that I have just said what is being done. We have employed design consultants to work on the design at this early stage in order that we can be ready to go immediately.

We can of course revisit all the arguments. For example, I have had a letter from somebody in the Aberdeen City Council administration asking whether we would reconsider the whole AWPR and put in a tunnel instead. There seems to be no end to the reasons that the Labour Party and its allies will produce to delay the projects rather than get on with them. What was most interesting was the reaction of Aberdeen City Council when we said that we would give it the cap that it had asked for on its contribution: the council wanted to continue the argument over the contribution, which was first agreed with the Labour Administration back in 2003, then agreed with us in March. However, the council wants to go back and argue about the question of its cap.

The difference is clear between Aberdeen City Council, which wants to continue to argue about that point rather than get on with the scheme, and Aberdeenshire Council, which said, "A deal is a deal. Let's get on with the project." Would that Aberdeen City Council would take a leaf out of Aberdeenshire Council's book.

The simple fact is that there are too many projects in the north-east, which obviously needs the projects, not least, as Richard Baker said, because of the economic activity in Aberdeen. However, the north-east should have had those projects years ago. There was a lack of investment in Scotland's transport infrastructure for decades when the Labour Party was in control and did nothing and when the Conservatives were in control for even longer. That was the situation at Scottish Office level, devolved Administration level and council level. Members should not forget that Haudagain and the AWPR started as a council project and that the previous Scottish Executive said that it would get involved in it.

The fact that we are contributing 81.5 per cent of the costs—there is of course a substantial cost to the taxpayer of providing the local authority's money in the first place—means that we are committed to the scheme and bringing it forward. I do not think that anybody, apart from Richard Baker, questions the fact that we had to observe the legal challenge that was made and try to see that through first. We had no control over that. If the scheme had been started many years ago, perhaps it would not have been started from where we are now. However, it was not started many years ago. The Labour Party talked about it, just as it talked about the Borders railway and the M74 but did not complete them. The difference between the Labour Party and the SNP is that we will get on and complete the projects in a way that the Labour Party never did.

I move amendment S4M-06657.1, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the end of the legal challenge against the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) and the progress that is being made to construct this vital route, with a swift move to procurement and the undertaking of essential preparatory works; commends the Scottish Government for confirming that it will pay for the Haudagain improvements, including the necessary compulsory purchase and compensation for those properties required to construct the improvements; recognises that attempting to re-engineer this junction prior to the opening of the AWPR would result in traffic chaos, severely constraining the economy of Aberdeen and the north east during construction; notes that all potential solutions identified by Aberdeen City Council require the delivery of a third Don crossing, something that has been opposed by Labour councillors and MSPs; further recognises that, in order to undertake the works at Haudagain, existing households will be relocated and the Scottish Government is working closely with Aberdeen City Council to ensure the relocation of vital services, such as the Middlefield Community Project

and the Middlefield Healthy Hoose, to appropriate accommodation, and believes that this needs to be done sensitively and with compassion in a realistic timescale and with appropriate consultation."

14:57

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It is wonderful what a by-election will do to focus Parliament on issues that are important to the people of Aberdeen, and the Aberdeen Donside by-election is living up to expectations.

So far, it has been said by the proposer of the motion and the proposer of the amendment that Aberdeen is the oil capital of Europe and a city that needs infrastructure and desperately needs its infrastructure to be developed. That of course is why a previous Conservative Government back in the 1980s began the process of ensuring that the road connections to Aberdeen and in the Aberdeen area were improved. That Conservative Government dualled the A90 all the way to Aberdeen. That same Conservative Government began the process of dualling the A96 with major work at Inverurie, and its final act before the 1997 election was for my old friend James Douglas Hamilton to take responsibility for cutting the first sod for the construction of the Kintore bypass.

The bypass was eventually opened by Henry McLeish. He took the opportunity to do that, but then unfortunately presided over a change in policy that meant that investment in road networks was downgraded and remained so for a full 10 years. That unfortunate circumstance has led to many of the problems that we see in Aberdeen today. However, Aberdeen's bottlenecks are more than simply the Haudagain roundabout, because there is of course the Brig o' Dee and the Bridge of Don, and the desperate need for a third Don crossing, which challenge has been taken up by the Conservative councillors on Aberdeen City Council. It was a motion in the name of that fine young councillor, Ross Thomson, that eventually led to the city council's commitment to build the third Don crossing, although the major partner in the council was very reluctant to take that on. However, progress is being made.

However, there is sense in some of the arguments in the motion. The idea that we might have to wait until 2018 before work can start on the Haudagain roundabout fills many of Aberdeen's road users with dread. My concern is to ensure that if we get nothing else out of this debate, we get some understanding from the Government about this priority.

In debates in the Parliament, much is said about shovel-ready projects. I have often asked whether an individual project is regarded as shovel ready, and I guess that the Haudagain roundabout is not a shovel-ready project. If the opportunity comes

along and funding becomes available to this or another Government before 2018, I like to think that the project could be prioritised.

Keith Brown: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: The commitment that I need from the minister today—I will give way if he is willing to give it—is that he will take action so that the Haudagain roundabout project is shovel ready at the earliest possible opportunity.

Keith Brown: If the member had listened to what I said, he would have heard me say that we have started on the design work, which is the necessary first step. Over and above that, we have given a commitment that we will fund all the compensation that must be provided in relation to the land assembly. A start has been made. However, is it not wise to wait until we are ready to go ahead with the project before doing so?

Alex Johnstone: The minister's intervention takes us into an area that I need to talk about, which is the time that projects take.

The minister went through a list of projects that were not completed earlier because of a lack of funding, but lack of funding is not the only problem that we face. In the context of the Aberdeen western peripheral route, we know the problems that are associated with a project that requires people to be moved from their houses, property to be purchased and land to be cleared if the project is to be completed.

For that reason, I fear that failure to advance the Haudagain project to shovel-ready status at the earliest possible opportunity will leave us exposed to further challenges, delays and damage to the Aberdeen economy. A simple commitment to take the project to shovel-ready status as quickly as possible is the best thing that the minister could provide today.

The Aberdeen economy has an enormous amount to deliver for the people of Aberdeen and the rest of Scotland. The creation of wealth in the north-east is there for all to see in the area's economic statistics, but support for the economy through the provision of effective infrastructure remains vital to the future of not just Aberdeen but the whole of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are tight for time, so members must stick to four-minute speeches.

15:02

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I have talked a lot in the Parliament recently about common sense—"gumption" is the word that we use in the north-east. Today, we see mair gimmick than gumption in the motion that the Labour Party

has lodged. We should not be surprised, because on transport policy Labour never seems to listen to the experts—the roads engineers, who know how things work. I would bet members a pound to a penny that Mr Baker has come to the chamber without looking at any of the modelling work that has been done on traffic in the great city of Aberdeen.

Today we heard Labour backtracking on its opposition over many years to a third Don crossing. When Willie Young was asked about the issue some time ago by the *Evening Express*, he said:

"We have been made aware by our officials that the Haudagain roundabout and Third Don Crossing comes as a package at the moment. That may be the situation and we may have to go along with that."

However, there has always been talk of daft alternatives, including from the current depute leader of the Labour-led Aberdeen City Council. She wants tunnels everywhere. How much will tunnels cost and how long will it take to get them into action? Does she know about the geology of the great city in which I live? I think not. Again, it is gimmick, not gumption.

That is what we have had all along. The debate is a knockabout one in some regards, and I am sad to see that everybody has put in their wee bit about the by-election. Were Brian Adam here, he would not be happy about some of the things that have been said.

Let us put all the knockabout to one side and look at the realities. My main concern is the realities that people face. At the end of the day, the Labour Party wants immediate action, but what will it do with the 200 households in Middlefield that will need to be rehoused? What will it do about the traffic disruption that will ensue should that immediate action take place? The traffic disruption would be massive.

Lewis Macdonald sits there and sneers. Apparently, he said on the radio this morning that building work at the Haudagain would cause no traffic disruption. I had a phone call from a constituent not so long ago who asked me to tell Mr Macdonald that that was chronic stupidity. I agree.

What about the vital services in Middlefield, such as the Middlefield Community Project and the Middlefield healthy hoose? What will happen to those services if immediate action is taken? The Labour motion is nonsense. It would see traffic disruption galore, the decimation of the north-east economy and the destruction of people's lives. I urge everyone in the chamber to look carefully at how they vote today.

15:06

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland (Lab)): Although Kevin Stewart offered to move on from the knockabout, he went on to produce one of the most comical speeches that I have heard. He asked a number of questions of the Labour Party but would not listen to a single answer. That sets a poor example. I am sure that Christian Allard will make a more positive speech.

We all know that investment in Aberdeen's infrastructure has been delayed too long. The question is what can be done to accelerate that investment. There is no dispute over the responsibility of Scotland's devolved Government for moving forward what are vital infrastructure projects.

The decision to build the Aberdeen western peripheral route as a trunk road was made by Jack McConnell more than 10 years ago. SNP ministers took office in 2007, with clear commitments on the WPR and the Haudagain, although their first big decision, as Stewart Stevenson will recall, was to push back the WPR's planned completion date to the end of 2012.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): No.

Lewis Macdonald: The Haudagain is part of the trunk road network and therefore the Scottish Government's responsibility.

I heard a little heckling from a sedentary position. I remind SNP members of Stewart Stevenson's commitment to the Parliament on 27 June 2007. He said that he could not meet the then programme for the WPR, which he pushed back to the end of 2012.

Three of the 22 most congested routes in Scotland converge at the Haudagain roundabout. All three are trunk roads under the stewardship of Scottish ministers. Journey time delays per vehicle mile are among the worst in Scotland. However, as we have heard again today, the SNP has not at any time—and certainly not since it came into government—accepted the case for urgent action on the Haudagain. Even when the WPR was held up by delay after delay in the courts, Keith Brown and his colleagues refused to accept that there was any merit in first sorting out the existing trunk road bottleneck.

Bruce Crawford: Will work at the Haudagain roundabout cause extra congestion around the city?

Lewis Macdonald: To answer Bruce Crawford's question, let me explain exactly what the evidence is. Unlike the WPR, no protracted legal challenges have been brought by objectors to improvements to the Haudagain junction. There are no third parties for ministers to blame. Inaction

on the Haudagain is entirely ministers' choice and responsibility.

We have heard again today that the SNP's only explanation is that

"attempting to re-engineer the junction prior to the opening of the AWPR would result in traffic chaos".

Because ministers take that view, we must all wait until at least 2018 before work is even started on this trunk road junction, for which ministers are responsible.

I went back to the STAG report, which recommended progress. The STAG report was commissioned by Aberdeen City Council, which was led in 2008 by the SNP. I read it again from cover to cover. The report does not say that work on the Haudagain has to wait until the WPR is open. The report describes in detail what is now the preferred option, which is

"retention of the existing roundabout at Haudagain and a new dual carriageway link"

between North Anderson Drive and Auchmill Road. The

"retention of the existing roundabout"

does not sound to me as if there should be any need for traffic chaos, far less any need to close the roundabout, as claimed by the SNP earlier today.

The report says:

"It should be possible to construct the new signalised junctions on Anderson Drive and Auchmill Road by using lane closures without the need for contra flows ... delays will result from the need for lane closures but should be of short duration."

For the avoidance of doubt, and for those who do not understand road engineering language, the report summarises the preferred option at the end. [Interruption.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Lewis Macdonald: It says:

"This option is implementable, but would cause some minor disruption during construction."

Ministers say, "Traffic chaos". Kevin Stewart says, "Closure of the roundabout". The STAG report says,

"some minor disruption during construction"—

that sounds like good advice to me.

Advisers advise; ministers decide. There is no good excuse for continuing inaction at one of the worst pinchpoints on Scotland's transport network. SNP ministers need to fix the Haudagain, as they have promised, and they need to do it now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Christian Allard, who is making his first speech in

Parliament, which we all welcome. I invite members in this heated debate to extend the usual courtesies to Monsieur Allard.

15:11

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. In the tradition of this Parliament, I will change the tone of this debate a little.

I thank everyone at the Scottish Parliament for welcoming me to this wonderful place. The kind words that I have received, from the cleaners to the Presiding Officer, testify that this Parliament is truly the people's Parliament.

My three daughters were very impressed by the reception that their French-born father received from every member sitting in the chamber last Wednesday, and I thank all members for that. It meant a lot to them and it meant a lot to me.

However, back home not everyone agreed with my choice of language. Back home, in Garioch, many told me that they would have preferred to hear me take the oath in Doric. I listened and pledged that my maiden speech would reflect the lives of the people who live in the north-east. I thank Richard Baker for giving me the opportunity to speak on a matter that the people of the north-east care about most: road infrastructure.

I take members back a couple of weeks to when, in the real world—a turn of phrase that is often used in the chamber—I braved the Haudagain roundabout every day to commute from Torry in Aberdeen to Kintore in Aberdeenshire. Let me be absolutely clear: in the real world, we all welcomed the end of the legal challenge against the AWPR and the progress that has been made since.

I will not repeat Kevin Stewart's excellent and logical reasons for delivering the AWPR and the works at the Haudagain to minimise the disruption to the many commuters in the north-east. Instead, I will take members on a journey across Scotland and beyond.

Many years ago, a major European haulage company asked a young French loon to come to Scotland to open an office in Glasgow. I take this opportunity to point out that we have made significant progress in road infrastructure in Scotland since, particularly in the central belt.

With the legal dispute behind us, it is now our turn in the north-east. I trust that we can deliver the same progress that we have seen delivered elsewhere in Scotland, with projects such as the completion of the M74 delivered under budget and ahead of schedule. It is right that our road network should reflect the energy boom that we are experiencing in the north-east.

Prosperity and growth have brought full employment in and around Aberdeen. The unemployment rate in Garioch is lower than 2 per cent, and in my home town of Westhill the rate is less than 1 per cent. I am proud to live in Westhill, which is the global centre of excellence in subsea engineering. Despite the constant efforts of all members who represent the north-east, that success story is still Scotland's best-kept secret. I am thinking about changing that.

The can-do attitude of the people of the north-east who work in the energy sector is respected across the world, and Doric is becoming an international language in the industry. Let us celebrate our achievements and match that can-do attitude with a positive message from the chamber today. We can and will deliver the AWPR, just as we will deliver the works at the Haudagain roundabout.

Brian Adam put the needs of the people who live in the north-east first when he represented the same region that I have the privilege and honour to represent today. He went on to represent the constituency of Aberdeen North from 2003 to 2011, and thereafter he represented Aberdeen Donside. No other politician in the north-east can claim to understand better the people's needs in respect of the Haudagain roundabout. It is no coincidence that Brian's constituency office is just a few yards away from the Haudagain roundabout. Like Kevin Stewart and other members who have spoken in the debate, I stopped many times at that office and was always made very welcome.

I am delighted that the improvements to the Haudagain roundabout will start on completion of the Aberdeen western peripheral route, because that is common sense. *[Applause.]*

15:16

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I am pleased to contribute to the debate. Apart from Kevin Stewart, who has lived in Middlefield for most of if not all his life, I am probably more aware of the problems at the Haudagain roundabout than any other member, having worked out of an office at the roundabout for five years from 2006 to 2011 and having visited regularly both before and after that.

I cannot understand the thought process that went through the heads of the Labour Party members who thought that this would be a good subject for debate for them. It begs the question that if making improvements to the Haudagain roundabout before completion of the AWPR was such a good idea, why was it not taken forward by the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration in Scotland any time between 1999 and 2007?

Why does the Labour Party think that it knows better than Nestrans, Transport Scotland and the local authorities' infrastructure departments? Labour members must understand that the AWPR needs to be in place before work on the Haudagain roundabout can begin, otherwise the congestion and disruption to commuters will be much worse than at present. Perhaps Lewis Macdonald, or whoever sums up for Labour, can tell us on what basis he claimed this morning on the radio that the building work at the Haudagain can happen without any traffic disruption. He said in his speech that there would be traffic disruption because of lane closures. I do not know how often he goes to the Haudagain roundabout, but if even one car breaks down anywhere near the Haudagain roundabout, there is massive traffic disruption. Where else in Scotland can he demonstrate that roadworks have not disrupted existing traffic flows?

Lewis Macdonald: I am very grateful to Maureen Watt for taking an intervention.

I accept that some disruption is caused if lanes must be closed in order for traffic lights to be installed. In the case of the Kessock bridge, some 17 weeks of disruption have been caused. That has been a matter of regret for the drivers who have been stuck on the bridge but, in the long term, it was the right decision to press ahead and install those traffic lights. It would be the right decision to install traffic lights on the new link road at the Haudagain, too.

Maureen Watt: On the radio this morning, Mr Macdonald said that that can happen without any traffic disruption—I quote him word for word. Perhaps he will retract that later today.

If Mr Baker had any idea of what drivers face, he would know the number of cars that come down through Manor and Logie to join the A96. For him to say that work would not disrupt that part of Middlefield shows how little he knows about the geography and traffic flows to the north of the city—a city that he is supposed to represent.

Following no action on transport issues in the north-east after the Labour-Lib Dem coalition got themselves into an almighty legal wrangle because of legal action, the SNP Government has wasted no time in procuring a design organisation to carry out preparatory work on improvements to the Haudagain roundabout.

Transport Scotland announced a £3 million design contract that was awarded to Jacobs UK Ltd as soon as the legal wrangle was concluded. Essential ground work on the AWPR began immediately, with Soil Engineering Geoservices Ltd winning a £1 million contract for six months' work. Agreement about funding has been reached,

although the Labour Party in the city continues to wrangle.

I admit that I was not previously in favour of the third Don crossing. However, I have listened to transport experts, and it is needed. Perhaps the city council will fulfil its part of the bargain and begin immediately to put in place that part of the transport infrastructure for the north-east of Scotland.

15:20

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

This debate is Labour's call for the Scottish Government to end the years of frustration felt by thousands of motorists throughout the north-east who have waited far too long for action to be taken on the Haudagain roundabout.

Many members will be aware of the delay that the roundabout causes for commuters daily. It sits on one of the busiest roads in Aberdeen, on the main route from the north of the city heading south to cities such as Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh and beyond.

The Haudagain connects the south of the city to Dyce, which has grown to house hundreds more jobs over the past eight years, and Aberdeen airport, which has seen a 4 per cent increase in passengers since last year alone. It also links local communities in Donside to the city centre, the beach, parks and leisure facilities throughout Aberdeen.

For those communities, each journey is marred by delays caused by traffic jams at the hectic roundabout. At peak times, queues of more than 20 minutes are not uncommon and, as Richard Baker pointed out, studies show that the economic cost to the north-east economy of those delays amounts to tens of thousands of pounds every year.

Labour is clear that action needs to be taken now. Commuters, families, air passengers and the north-east economy cannot afford to wait another seven years for work to be completed. If they have to wait that long, by the time the improvements are completed, we could have paid for them seven times over with the amount lost from Aberdeen's economy. We cannot justify that in tough economic times. While families throughout the north-east bear the brunt of SNP cuts to local services, it is complacent of the SNP to cost them more through its lack of action.

The current proposal to wait until the Aberdeen western peripheral route is complete makes no sense, as Lewis Macdonald outlined. As we heard, when it is complete, the Haudagain will no longer be the responsibility of the Scottish Government; instead, it will be the responsibility of the local

council and Aberdeen taxpayers. In the absence of a formal commitment by the SNP that it will stick to its promise of paying for the improvements, there is a risk that, by the time 2020 comes around, Aberdonians will bear the brunt of the cost.

Keith Brown: What about 2011?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order.

Jenny Marra: That is complacency and is letting the north-east down.

Last week, Labour-led Aberdeen City Council showed its commitment to improving the roads around the Haudagain by bringing forward new plans to link Dyce Drive to the A96 trunk road by 2015. Today, we ask that the SNP show its commitment, too. It has the opportunity to halt the drain on the north-east economy and end the years of frustration felt by commuters and local residents by tackling the Haudagain roundabout now. I hope that it sees sense and commits to that.

15:24

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): One or two references have been made to events that I thought I had been at, but members' recollection appears to differ fundamentally from mine.

I am reminded of what one American President said when he came into office. It is apposite to the situation that the Scottish Government found in 2007. He said:

"We were astonished to find that things were even worse than we'd been saying they were."

When we came into office in 2007, in relation to the AWPR, for which there had been great fanfares of announcements, not a single day of preparation had taken place. The fantasy target for completion was dead in the water before the first vote in the 2007 election had been cast.

It is worth reminding members to the left of me of one of the very first actions of those who opposed that new SNP Government. The very first vote that the 47 members on the Government benches lost to the 82 on the Opposition benches was a vote against our policy, so £500 million was to be spent on trams in Edinburgh rather than spread to other parts of Scotland, including, in particular, to fund improvements to road networks in the north-east of Scotland. That decision was made by the Labour Party and was supported by the Liberals and the Tories. We opposed it. That money could have been invested in the north-east, and we said so at the time. I continue to say so today.

In her speech, Jenny Marra—a North East Scotland MSP—talked about Dyce Drive creating a new and improved link to the airport. I am not quite sure that she knows where that is in relation to the Haudagain roundabout—she may not have been there, so we have to forgive her for her lack of geographical knowledge.

Jenny Marra also spoke about the north-east paying the price for Scottish Government cuts. Let us not debate the original source of those cuts—we have done so on many previous occasions; let us focus on the financial management of the Labour Party in the north-east. When the Scottish Government came into power in 2007, Aberdeen city had the highest band D tax of any council in Scotland. We have had the privilege of being able to protect the people of the north-east from further increases—would that we had the economic powers to do even better.

Lewis Macdonald *rose—*

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

Stewart Stevenson: Of course, we know what the Labour Party's policy on that matter is today. Bernard Ponsonby, interviewing Willie Young, extracted the confession that it was not good enough that Aberdeen was merely the highest-taxed local authority area in Scotland. He wanted the council tax to be higher there. He wanted to raise it even more.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab) *rose—*

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

Stewart Stevenson: We know where the Labour Party is as regards the money that it would squeeze from the successful economy of the north-east.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab) *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is concluding.

Stewart Stevenson: We know that the Labour Party took money from the north-east to pay for the Edinburgh trams. Then, in Glasgow, it campaigned to say that the north-east was getting all the money instead of Glasgow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can you conclude, please?

Stewart Stevenson: I am happy to support the amendment in Keith Brown's name. I congratulate Christian Allard on an excellent maiden speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come now to the winding-up speeches. Nanette Milne has a tight four minutes.

15:28

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Christian Allard on a very good speech.

This afternoon's debate raises a number of issues of very real importance to the citizens of Aberdeen and its hinterland, but much of what has been said is a reiteration of what we have heard in the chamber on many occasions in recent months and years. Apart from raising the profile of the Aberdeen Donside by-election, I am not sure what the debate is expected to achieve.

No one denies that the continuing congestion at the Haudagain roundabout is a serious problem for drivers in Aberdeen and that it is detrimental to the local economy. The current argument is whether improvements at the roundabout should be put in place before or after the completion of the Aberdeen western peripheral route. There is a clear difference of opinion between Labour politicians and the Scottish Government, which this debate is not going to resolve.

I understand why Labour keeps hammering away at the issue. I, too, am disappointed that more immediate work is not being undertaken to solve the problems at the A90/A96 junction. To continue with Alex Johnstone's plea, I urge Keith Brown and his officials to reconsider the feasibility of bringing forward the timescale so that the Haudagain improvements can be completed very soon after the north leg of the AWPR is in place. I see that as the earliest possible opportunity.

The Government has confirmed its intention to pay for the improvements, which is welcome and reassuring. Welcome, too, is the recent commitment of the Labour-Conservative coalition in Aberdeen City Council to the completion of the link road between the A96 and Dyce Drive by 2015, as is mentioned in the Labour motion.

Notably omitted from the motion, however, is the delivery of a third Don crossing, which was finally agreed this year after many fruitless years of Labour opposition to it. I was a city councillor in Aberdeen for 11 years between 1988 and 1999, and, if my memory is correct, during that time I and my Conservative colleagues voted three times for such a crossing but the proposal was always defeated by Labour. The arguments were always the same from the local councillor, backed by his group. He said, "You're not putting a crossing through my Tillydrone", as if that part of the city was Labour's by right. Never mind the greater good of the rest of the city, notably the improvements that such a crossing would make to the lives of the residents of Bridge of Don and the many commuters who enter the city from the north.

Until the Conservatives on the council made the third Don crossing a non-negotiable part of their coalition agreement with Labour, the arguments continued. Thankfully, there is now a commitment to the structure, although the Labour group in the Parliament is clearly reluctant to acknowledge that. I just wish that there had been the same resolve on the proposals to continue with the city garden project—an issue that is still infuriating local residents, as I have found when campaigning in the current by-election.

Kevin Stewart: It is good that we are now seeing some progress on the holy trinity of the third Don crossing, the Haudagain and the AWPR, and I am glad to say that roads engineers are finally being listened to, which is logical.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quickly, please.

Kevin Stewart: Does the member think that we should put the experts' opinion first when we take such decisions?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Nanette Milne has one minute left.

Nanette Milne: We all have to listen to experts before we take decisions, but at the end of the day, decisions are political.

Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland undoubtedly need major infrastructure improvements, and it has taken far too long to put them in place. I have been campaigning for an Aberdeen bypass of some kind for a quarter of a century but, if I am correct, it was only in 2003 that the then Labour and Lib Dem coalition Executive agreed to the proposed AWPR being a trunk road, and since then costs have escalated after many legal challenges to the proposals. Recently, I have been pressing the Minister for Transport and Veterans to cap the costs that the local authorities will have to pay for the new road, and I am delighted that he has agreed to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Nanette Milne: I will, Presiding Officer.

I reiterate my disappointment that there will be no action until the completion of the whole AWPR. I ask the minister whether that can be brought forward to the completion of the northern leg. Labour's record cannot be without criticism, but I urge all sides to put aside party-political differences and work for the good of Aberdeen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are now extremely tight for time. I call Keith Brown. You have a maximum of six minutes, minister.

15:32

Keith Brown: I want to pick up on Nanette Milne's final points, because they are instructive in this debate. She perfectly exposed the Labour Party's failures in relation to infrastructure in the north-east over many years, and also the hypocrisy around some of the schemes that have been mentioned. It struck me before Stewart Stevenson mentioned it that the trams and the projects that we are discussing have something in common. The price that we are paying for the trams—the best part of three quarters of a billion pounds—is roughly equivalent to the price of the Balmedie to Tippetty/AWPR scheme. Alex Johnstone mentioned that the issue of money is—obviously—very important. To me, spending that level of finance on a tram project for Edinburgh is very much second best to the option of investing in the north-east, which I would much prefer to have done.

It was also interesting to hear Mr Johnstone talk about Henry McLeish and shovel-ready projects, and the 10-year hiatus under the Labour Party during which there was not the required investment in roads. We all remember that period. He asked me quite seriously to make sure that the project is as shovel ready as possible by 2018. I think that that was the point that he made. Of course, if we were able to do it earlier than that, that would be great as well, but I think that his point was that we should go through the various processes, legal and otherwise, that we have to go through as quickly as possible to ensure that the project is shovel ready as quickly as possible.

I am happy to give Mr Johnstone that commitment. We are trying to do that. We started it off with the design process, but we realise that there are many other processes that have to be followed through. In particular, we need to consider the rights of the people who live in Middlefield. Kevin Stewart made that point. They really should have their interests taken into account. The idea of just bulldozing it now, before doing that, is nonsensical. It is important that we follow the processes through. However, I take the point that we want to ensure that the project is shovel ready at the point when we are able to do it.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I want to make one other point first.

The point has been made to me by Nestrans, the local authorities and the experts in Transport Scotland that we will cause substantial disruption if we do it now and we will not get the benefits unless we do the AWPR and the third Don crossing first.

Lewis Macdonald: I simply seek clarification of a comment that the minister made a moment ago. I think he said that, if it could be done sooner than 2018, that would be great as well. Is that a commitment to look at bringing forward the target date for the project? If so, will he spell that out, please?

Keith Brown: No, the commitment that I made to Alex Johnstone just now is that we will do all that we can to make the project happen as quickly as possible. I went on to say that I agree with Transport Scotland, Nestrans and local authorities that it cannot be done and should not be done until the AWPR is completed. In a perfect world, if the AWPR was completed and it could be done two years early, that would be fantastic, but we have to take the advice of experts on the project.

The speech by Christian Allard was excellent—he managed to strike a much better tone than most of the rest of us have done during the debate. It was an excellent maiden speech and he is very welcome to the Parliament.

It is worth saying a few words about the motion. It is a shambles of a motion. Richard Baker must really regret having put the motion together. In fact, his colleagues on the Labour back benches behind him—although they will not say it just now, of course—must think that Richard has dropped them in it once again. The motion totally exposes the lack of activity from the Labour Party over many years. It has obviously been dreamed up because a by-election is taking place. There is no other rationale for it. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Keith Brown: I read a comment from Richard Baker that Mark McDonald had never raised the issue. Mark McDonald raised the issue with me all the time. I had a number of conversations with him about it. When has Richard Baker raised the issue as a debate before? He has raised it because there is a by-election, which shows how flimsy, nonsensical and unserious the debate is.

Richard Baker: In the previous session of Parliament, I raised the issue as a debating subject, and I have lodged a host of parliamentary questions on it. When will the minister bring forward the planning application for the route?

Keith Brown: I have just finished saying—I think that I have said it three times in the debate—that we will go through the various legal procedures and other procedures and—

Richard Baker: When?

Keith Brown: I have just said two or three times that we will try to ensure that all the procedures are done before 2018. I cannot help it if the Labour Party does not listen. I cannot help it if Jenny Marra does not listen to me say in my opening

speech that we will bear the costs that are associated with the scheme and then goes on to demand that I make clear what I have just said it a few minutes before. I cannot speak for what the Labour Party does not want to hear.

Kevin Stewart: When the matter was discussed by the council in 2008, Councillor Neil Cooney, who is a Labour councillor, described option 5—the route through Middlefield—as the Middlefield clearances, yet last week, Councillor Cooney, who is now also the chair of housing and environment in the city, watered down the proposals that were meant to ensure that moneys were ring fenced to regenerate Middlefield and to ensure that people were properly rehoused. What does the minister think of the hypocrisy of Councillor Cooney and is that the same hypocritical stance that we see from Mr Baker?

Keith Brown: I was just going to come to how the Labour Party seems to face two ways on so many issues these days. This is a perfect example of that. It is like somebody who is about to cross the road who looks left, looks right and then decides to stay exactly where they are rather than go across the road and get the job done. That has been borne out, for example, by the M74 and M90 projects, which have been completed under this Administration, and by the delays that there have been over the Borders railway. Also, even though we knew for years that the Forth road bridge was going to reach its capacity in 1994, nothing was done by the Labour Party. It delayed committing any finances to the Forth crossing project until it was thrown out of office. The same was true of the Conservative Party. We knew that those projects had to be undertaken.

The AWPR should have been taken forward many years ago, and in the various excuses—the need for a cap, which I was happy to agree with; the proposal that we look again at the contribution of the councils, which I am not happy to agree with; and the challenges that we have had from the Labour Party about the legal challenges and how they could have been dealt with—we see that there is always a reason for not making progress. It is not so much the Haudagain as, “Haud me back again”—finding a reason not to do something, rather than cracking on and doing it, which is what this Administration will do.

15:38

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): As a resident of the far south of Scotland, I am not a frequent driver on the trunk roads around Aberdeen. However, on those few occasions when I have driven between Inverness and Elgin and Aberdeen and to the south, the Haudagain roundabout has certainly made a lasting impression on me. It has been a surprise to me

that a city the size and importance of Aberdeen has such a poor ring-road system.

The delays since the preferred route was announced in 2006 and the legal challenges, culminating in the decision of the Court of Session, must have been immensely frustrating to all concerned, but the lack of action on the Haudagain itself must surely have added to those frustrations.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: Not just now, Mr Stevenson—I will come to you later.

I congratulate Christian Allard on his maiden speech, and on paying tribute not only to Brian Adam but to the people of his region. As far as I am concerned, he can go on and speak in French, as I would like to hear it.

As we heard in Richard Baker's opening speech, there have been many motions and parliamentary questions about improvements to the Haudagain roundabout since the Parliament was established. On 31 May 2005, Brian Adam, who was then the MSP for what was at that time the Aberdeen North constituency, lodged a motion noting that the Haudagain roundabout had been labelled the worst roundabout in the country and that, as it was part of a trunk road, it was the responsibility of the then Scottish Executive, and calling on ministers to make its improvement a priority.

It is not at all surprising that a diligent constituency MSP such as Brian Adam would lodge a motion that demanded action on an issue of concern to his constituents. However, the motion was also signed by John Swinney and Alex Neil. The former became Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth two years later, and the latter served as Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment for a period. If the improvement of the roundabout was a priority in May 2005, why did it cease to be a priority when they could do something about it?

Bruce Crawford: Will Elaine Murray tell me which is the more important project for Labour: the Glasgow airport rail link project or the Haudagain roundabout?

Elaine Murray: They are both important—one cannot be singled out. What is the most important project for the SNP? We all have a list of important projects, and some of us may disagree with each other about which ones are more important.

Eight years later, the roundabout improvement is still just part of a commitment to improve transport in the north-east, and we are awaiting the completion of the Aberdeen western peripheral

route before an improvement scheme can even commence.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: No—I will not necessarily give way to you just because you have a loud voice, Mr Stewart.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please.

Elaine Murray: It is no wonder that Stewart Stevenson talked about anything other than the Haudagain roundabout in his contribution, because it constitutes a U-turn by his Government. In January 2008, when Stewart Stevenson was Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, he apparently pledged—according to the *Aberdeen Evening Express*—that he would have the roundabout “fixed” by the time the bypass was built.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: He told the *Aberdeen Evening Express* that he was confident that congestion could be cracked without a flyover.

In that publication on 31 January 2008, Mr Stevenson was quoted—it may be a misquote—as saying:

“The sooner we fix this, the happier I’m going to be, not just as the Minister for Transport, but also as someone who drives the Haudagain.”

Stewart Stevenson: I have always said that the Haudagain has to be fixed after the AWPR. The 8,200 vehicles that will be diverted away from the Haudagain by the AWPR are equivalent to one car every nine seconds, 24 hours a day.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

Stewart Stevenson: If we take those vehicles away, we then have the space to fix the Haudagain roundabout. That is why I have always said that the sequence should be the AWPR and then the Haudagain.

Elaine Murray: I hope that the member told the *Aberdeen Evening Express* that on 31 January 2008 it was totally wrong.

Keith Brown said that Richard Baker has not raised the issue in Parliament—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Elaine Murray: However, Mr Baker has lodged a number of questions. He was told first that the AWPR was due to be completed in 2018, and that the Haudagain would not be started until at least nine months later, which takes the project into 2019.

I ask the minister to listen to what my colleagues in the Conservative Party are saying in this instance about making the roundabout a shovel-ready project. Why could the planning application not be submitted now? There is surely more that the Government could be doing to ensure that the project gets off the stocks.

Keith Brown: Would Elaine Murray submit a planning application before she had done the design work to work out exactly what she was going to do? Most people would not. That is the way that roads projects tend to work.

Elaine Murray: The Government already has the route, and it has committed £3 million to the design of the project. It should get a move on and submit the planning application.

My colleague Jenny Marra referred to the need for a commitment on costs if the roads are to be detrunked in the sequence that the ministers are proposing. I heard the minister say that the Scottish Government will pay for that, but has he made that commitment in writing to Aberdeen City Council so that it is legally binding?

The minister is committing a future Government—not himself—to that timescale. Has he made that a legally binding commitment? [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Elaine Murray: Delay is frustrating for the hard-pressed users of the roundabout and those who live in its vicinity. In 2011, it was the only Scottish entry to be included in the shortlist for something called “Roundabout Idol”—which I had never heard of before—as one of the worst roundabouts in the UK. That is hardly something to be proud of.

Even Nestrans confesses that it takes between seven and 22 minutes to cross the roundabout. As Richard Baker mentioned, the Institute of Directors estimates that such delays cost £15 million to £30 million a year in lost time, environmental pollution, fuel consumption and productivity. As Jenny Marra said, the amount of money that we are losing could pay for the scheme several times over, so we must ask how much more cost there will be to the local economy. Indeed, given the way in which the costs of capital projects escalate, how much more will the final cost be due to such delays?

Presiding Officer, sorry, do I have seven minutes in total?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have slightly more, but you are almost in your last minute.

Elaine Murray: I hope that Kevin Stewart listened carefully to Lewis Macdonald’s speech, which explained in great detail what option 5 meant and what the STAG report—as opposed to

the scaremongering that has been put about—actually said about lane closures causing minor disruption. For example, on the A75 in my constituency, a very welcome project is under way that everyone knows will cause some delays, but constituents are prepared to tolerate delays for a short period if they will get a far better result in the longer term.

Dennis Robertson: Will the member take an intervention?

Elaine Murray: I have taken three interventions, so I will not take any more.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you could conclude, Dr Murray.

Elaine Murray: Once again, this is a case of SNP members saying one thing when they are in opposition and another when they are in government. People have longer memories than ministers may think, and commitments made and later abandoned will come back to haunt them.

Ferry Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06658, in the name of Richard Baker, on ferry services. I inform members that timing is extremely tight, so any interventions must be taken in members' own time. If members could take slightly less than the time allocated, that would be helpful.

I call Richard Baker to speak to and move the motion. Mr Baker, you have a maximum of 10 minutes.

15:47

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): I hope that the debate will give Keith Brown a chance to do rather better on this occasion—we all live in hope. This is the third time in the current parliamentary session that Scottish Labour has initiated a debate on ferry services, and that is for two reasons: first, ferries provide a lifeline service for our island communities; and, secondly, the Scottish Government has been responsible for a series of serious mistakes in its approach to ferry services.

With the publication of the long-awaited ferries review last December, a raft of fare increases was announced that will result in fares to the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree increasing by an average rate of 8.2 per cent and, with the removal of road equivalent tariff funding for commercial vehicles, increases of up to 10 per cent in fares for such journeys. The recently published analysis that was commissioned by the Scottish Government shows that the removal of RET is having exactly the impact that members across the chamber warned ministers about. The increased costs to hauliers and island households amount to a tax on island communities.

Given those findings, and given the debacle of the withdrawal of the NorthLink service from Scrabster to Stromness due to the breakdown of the Hamnavoe, it is no wonder that the minister declined our request two weeks ago that he come to the chamber to make a parliamentary statement on ferries. Today, we bring the issue to him, and we will look for answers on both those issues. We also wish to highlight our concern over the proposal from CalMac Ferries for significant pay cuts for its port staff, although I am more hopeful that we will find a consensus across the parties on that issue.

Let me begin with the removal of RET from commercial vehicles. The consultants' report that was published in April showed that the decision had resulted in a "significant negative impact" on hauliers. The report's importance was neatly

summed up by Gail Robertson of the Outer Hebrides Transport Group, who said:

"It is an instructive document that clearly shows the devastating, negative impact the removal of cheaper fares are having on island families and businesses. We can appreciate why Keith Brown was reluctant to publish this document - it nails and dispels many assertions that were untrue."

The consultants' report highlights that the removal of RET for commercial vehicles has had a negative effect on the margins of small hauliers in particular and has necessitated an increase in prices for network hauliers.

The report also raised the concern that, as many parts of the Western Isles are characterised by relatively high levels of deprivation, if higher fares and transport charges lead to a reduction in income and employment, the outcome could be a worsening of the position.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): If the measure was so vital, why did the Labour Government not bring it in when it was in power prior to the Scottish National Party coming into office?

Richard Baker: Our commitment to RET was clear in our most recent manifesto. It is regrettable that the SNP has failed to stick to its commitments on this important issue.

The report found—as we and many others said it would—that the removal of RET for commercial vehicles would lead to higher prices for islanders, with 88 per cent of businesses who participated in the survey noting that the increase in commercial vehicle fares had been passed on to their businesses.

The other key aspect of the findings is that, despite what Alex Neil said in the previous debate on the issue, the report concluded that hauliers had passed on the savings from RET to their customers. That is why Chris MacRae of the Freight Transport Association said that the report showed that the removal of RET from commercial vehicles was a grave mistake that resulted directly in price rises on the islands and the weakening of fragile economies. He also said:

"The logistics industry was incensed last year when the then Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment Alex Neil stated that hauliers were not passing on this benefit to islanders."

He went on to say:

"The Report illustrates that the point made by Alex Neil and other MSPs to be without any foundation and we would ask the current Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment to issue an unreserved apology to the hard-working companies that do such work underpinning island economies."

I am interested to know whether that apology will be forthcoming today and what material action

the Scottish Government will take to rectify the mistakes that it has clearly made in removing RET from those commercial vehicles.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The general consensus on the island of Lewis is that the hauliers did not pass on the benefits of RET, so perhaps the member should speak to some of those people. In addition, the report points out that it was hard to assess the impact of the removal of RET against the general economic slowdown and the 16 per cent increase in haulage costs between 2008 and 2012, which was mainly due to fuel price increases.

Richard Baker: The member should perhaps read the report that was commissioned by his own Government, which found that RET had been passed on by the hauliers. I can tell the member that many people on Lewis know very well that the savings from RET were passed on to local businesses. They are now feeling the pinch because of the increase in prices as a result of a decision that his Government made. That is the prevailing opinion of which I have been made well aware. I would be interested to know what the Scottish Government will do to rectify the mistake that it has made.

We will support Mr McArthur's amendment to our motion on RET, as we believe that he makes a reasonable point regarding the potential for piloting the application of RET in the northern isles, although we acknowledge that the costs would need to be scoped.

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): Will the member give way?

Richard Baker: If I have time, I will take an intervention from the minister later.

The second issue on ferries that we bring to the Parliament is one that Mr McArthur has raised on many occasions, which is the interruption to the crucial NorthLink service between Scrabster and Stromness, which has been of such concern to the community in Orkney, particularly as we approach the crucial tourism season. It is vital that we have certainty over the future of that vital service but, when the Hamnavoe broke down, Serco had no contingencies in place.

The background to the situation is, of course, the shambles of the award of the NorthLink contract, which saw a legal challenge mounted in court and the minister instructing CalMac, which had previously run the service, not to appeal its exclusion from the bidding process on a technicality. We raised a number of concerns about the process, and today we ask whether the issue of contingencies for incidents such as the one that has occurred with the Hamnavoe was properly factored into the procurement process.

I will take an intervention from the minister, if he still wants to intervene.

Keith Brown: I do, but it is on the member's previous point. I just want to clarify something about RET. Is it the Labour Party's position that RET should be applied to all commercial hauliers across Scotland and, if so, does that mean that it has now reversed its previous opposition to RET?

Richard Baker: Mr McArthur's amendment talks about a pilot. It seems to me that researching and studying the potential for the issues before we rule things out is not unreasonable.

I understand that if the NorthLink service had remained with CalMac, capacity would have existed to have a replacement ferry in a couple of days. However, when the contract was removed from the publicly owned CalMac and awarded to Serco, the minister hailed the announcement, saying that it would

"ensure that people travelling to and from Orkney and Shetland will continue to have access to safe, reliable and affordable ferry services in the future."

However, over the past few weeks the Scottish Government has been paying for a service that it is not receiving. That is why we ask the minister to inform us what financial penalties Serco will incur and what action will be taken so that people can have greater confidence in the reliability of that crucial service in the future.

The experience of the award of the NorthLink contract shows the influence that ministers exercise over CalMac's decisions, and the final ferry services issue that we bring to the chamber is one on which we ask ministers to exercise their influence in a positive way. Last week, members of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association organised a briefing with employees of CalMac who face a 25 per cent pay cut, at which MSPs heard from four employees who face the prospect of losing several thousand pounds of shift allowances annually if CalMac imposes the new contracts. That will affect around 70 mainly female clerical employees, many of whom work in rural parts of Scotland and many of whom are the main earner in their household.

Even with their shift allowances, those workers do not earn a high wage. One employee said that her current salary was slightly over £22,000, more than £4,000 of which she stands to lose if the proposals are imposed. Those employees frequently go beyond their duties in order to serve the passengers and, indeed, the communities with whom they work. Given that the jobs in question are crucial jobs in often fragile economies, that development is a particularly concerning one.

I have received a response from CalMac, with which I have raised those concerns directly, but they have not been allayed by that response.

Although we have raised contentious issues in the debate, I am pleased that Labour members were able to support Kenny Gibson's motion on the matter, and I know that the minister has also met members of the TSSA here in the Parliament. I hope that he can provide us with a positive response on that issue, at least.

I look forward to hearing the minister's response on the other substantive concerns that we have raised. It is because our ferry services are of such importance to our island communities that ministers must ensure that they are affordable and reliable for passengers, and that they are properly supported. We believe that, in key areas, ministers have failed in that duty.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government needs to take action to address a number of failings in its policy on ferries; calls on it to provide a detailed response to the report that it commissioned on the effect of the removal of road equivalent tariff from commercial vehicles, which found that this has had a detrimental impact on hauliers and island communities; further calls on ministers to outline what financial penalties have been levied on Serco following its failure to run the Stromness to Scrabster service because of a mechanical failure to MV Hamnavoe and what action is being taken to ensure that this service is not disrupted in the future; expresses concern that Caledonian MacBrayne's proposals could see many port staff receive pay cuts of up to 25%, and believes that the Scottish Government should make clear in a statement that it does not believe that this publicly owned company should proceed with these proposals.

15:56

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): We welcome the opportunity to discuss the commercial vehicles study. We commissioned it because we were determined to provide additional clarity for businesses and the local economies in the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree. We wanted to assess the socioeconomic impact on those communities of the removal of RET for commercial vehicles. The report was first published on Transport Scotland's website on 26 April.

It is worth remembering that the decision to remove RET for commercial vehicles was partly a result of the cuts that Westminster imposed on us. It was a very difficult decision. Interestingly, this morning I was in Wales, where I listened to a report in which Carwyn Jones said that the Welsh Government had further difficult decisions to take because of cuts that it had experienced and cuts that it expected. Such realism is not evident among Labour members in this place, given their continued demands for more spending in virtually every area of Government.

We have done everything possible to make additional funding available for a transitional

scheme. Over the past two years, we have provided £4.5 million for that. We have also introduced additional concessions and made a change that means that small commercial vehicles are now eligible for RET fares.

As the report said—and as Angus MacDonald pointed out—it is hard to assess the impact of the removal of RET against the background of the general economic situation in a recession. Between 2008 and 2012, there was a 16 per cent increase in haulage costs, which was primarily a result of increases in other costs, such as the 17 per cent increase in fuel costs, which account for a third of all haulage costs.

In the ferries plan that we published at the end of last year, which Richard Baker mentioned, we committed to use the study to inform the terms of reference for an overarching freight fares policy. Anyone who looked at the freight fares policy—and, indeed, the passenger fares policy—that the Parliament applied prior to 2007 would not be able to work out a rationale for why certain fares applied in certain circumstances while different fares applied in others. There was no objective rationale. We will try to provide such a rationale through the freight fares policy.

The need for that was confirmed in the report. Businesses in the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree stressed the need for a clearly defined long-term fares strategy. To take that forward, we have established a working group that will include broad representation from key stakeholders. The aim is to deliver a commercial vehicles fares structure for all Scotland's islands that is fair, transparent and straightforward and which delivers the best value for taxpayers at a time of severe cuts to the Scottish Government's budget. That is a stricture that any Government would have to adhere to.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Given that the minister commissioned the report, what cognisance of it will he take when he sets out the policy? Will he take the economic development of the islands into account when he does that?

Keith Brown: I have just mentioned that we have established a working group that will include broad representation from key stakeholders. In looking at the freight fares policy, it will take the report into account. I have forgotten the second part of the member's question, but we would not have commissioned the report if we did not want to give it further consideration.

The aim must be a fair vehicle fare structure for the whole country. That said, it is vital that we do not lose sight of RET's benefits, especially for passengers, cars and small commercial vehicles and coaches, and the major impact that there clearly is on tourism in the islands. In addition, we plan to improve from this winter the level of winter

services offered to Barra, Lochboisdale, Coll and Tiree.

I will turn to the second point in the complex and multifaceted motion that Richard Baker has laid before Parliament: the MV Hamnavoe. The ship is obviously an important element of the lifeline ferry service to Orkney, but with regard to the breakdown of the starboard main engine—I have forgotten what Richard Baker called it, but it was fiasco, debacle or some such term—I have to say that no one can foresee these things. They happen from time to time; strangely enough, they have happened in the past under a Labour-Liberal Administration. When it happened this time, it was through no fault of the ferry operator, Serco NorthLink, whose technical staff ensure that all vessels are maintained to a very high standard, well above and beyond the required legal minimum.

Like any responsible transport provider, Serco undertakes regular contingency planning exercises to make appropriate provision for disruption. I know that the current situation is not ideal and I understand that the Hamnavoe is the preferred vessel for the people in Orkney. However, they are also able to get to Orkney with Pentland Ferries, John O' Groats Ferries and the Aberdeen service, and the freighter MV Helliard has been set aside to help with passengers and freight. As the people in Orkney whom I met last week were very keen to point out, Orkney is not closed for business and capacity is being met through the different provisions that have been put in place.

It was simply not possible to source an additional vessel. Last week, I heard a suggestion from the Labour benches that we should have a separate vessel on standby in any event, but the cost of that on top of the contract would be enormous and run to millions of pounds. I do not think it right to spend taxpayers' money in that way, which is why we have not done it.

Rhoda Grant: Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: This will be my second and last intervention.

Rhoda Grant: I think that I made the suggestion that the minister has referred to. I said that the boat would pay for itself by working the secondary route between Mallaig and Lochboisdale and that it could be taken off to cover other services in emergencies.

Keith Brown: I would have to check but I think that our estimated cost for the route runs into tens of millions of pounds. We cannot continue to spend money that we do not have; we need to have some realism on this issue.

As for the idea of commissioning another boat for another service that would then be used as a standby, does the member think that the people of Lochboisdale and Mallaig would be happy for the boat to be taken away and used somewhere else? I do not think so. As the member well knows, we do not have the money for such a project. I simply remind her of what Liam Byrne, the last Labour Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said: "There is no money left." That is the Labour Party's legacy.

Provisions have been made. I have mentioned the three to four return sailings a day for passengers and vehicles on Pentland Ferries services; two return sailings a day on the service operated by John O' Groats Ferries; Serco NorthLink's own Aberdeen to Kirkwall sailings; and the two return sailings a day on the Helliær, which Serco has brought into the Scrabster to Stromness route. This is not what Serco wants; it wants the Hamnavoe back. The latest news is that we expect it to be back in service tomorrow, depending on today's sea trials, but provision has been made in that respect and I have looked closely at the breakdown of Serco's response.

On Richard Baker's point about penalties, I think that I made clear in a previous topical question time that every time a sailing does not take place the penalty is around £7,000. Of course, the situation is complicated by the fact that the Helliær is undertaking some of the sailings so we have to work out how penalties will apply. However, Serco will face penalties for not providing the service.

I do not have much time left so I will address in my summing up the third issue raised by Richard Baker: the TSSA situation. I have made it clear to CalMac and in public statements that the matter is really between employer and trade unions, and I have insisted that discussions take place and that the trade unions are fully consulted. The parties are in the midst of those discussions and it is only right that they take their course, but I am interested in the outcome.

I move amendment S4M-06658.2, to leave out from first "believes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the implementation of road equivalent tariff (RET) to Islay, Colonsay and Gigha in October 2012 and the decisions to roll out RET to Arran in October 2014 and to all the Clyde and Hebrides routes in the current parliamentary session; further welcomes the planned investment of £333.1 million between 2012-13 and 2014-15 in Scotland's ferry services, including an additional £2.5 million in 2012-13, and £2 million in 2013-14, to support hauliers to the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree, where fare increases have also been capped and small commercial vehicles benefit from the same fares as ordinary motorists, all against a backdrop of falling budgets from the UK Government; also welcomes the firm commitment to providing a high-quality ferry service across the Pentland Firth as part of the overall Northern Isles ferry service and the effective contingency arrangements that are in place following the mechanical failure that has affected the MV

Hamnavoe; further welcomes the commitment of all parties to learn lessons from this incident to provide good, clear and effective communication with ferry users, and notes that, while the ongoing dispute with some of Caledonian MacBrayne's port staff is a matter between the employer and the unions, it supports both parties in seeking an early resolution to avoid any impact on ferry services on Clyde and Hebrides routes."

16:04

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, welcome this afternoon's debate and the opportunity that it provides to consider an issue of pressing importance to Orkney and the constituents whom I represent. I am also happy to confirm that we will support Richard Baker's motion as well as the amendment in my name.

I will come to questions arising out of the Hamnavoe's absence from the Stromness to Scrabster route over the last month in a moment, but first I want to address longer-standing concerns about the Government's approach to RET as reflected in my amendment.

Nowhere is the Government's cynicism and short-termism more in evidence than in its handling of RET. In deciding to focus the pilot phase of its cheap ferry fare scheme exclusively on routes that serve the Western Isles, ministers made it abundantly clear that their priority was not a coherent ferries policy for all of Scotland's islands but a political calculation about how to shore up their support in a key Scottish National Party constituency.

Kenneth Gibson: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: In a second.

That impression was only reinforced by nods and winks from ministers to local councillors in my constituency that Orkney needed to elect an SNP MSP if it wanted similar benefits to be directed northwards. Such deplorable behaviour tells me everything that I need to know about what makes the SNP Government stink.

Does Mr Gibson want to intervene?

Kenneth Gibson: Yes. I am sorry, but I have almost lost my train of thought. If RET was introduced for the Western Isles for political purposes, why was it not introduced for my constituency? I had a majority of only 48, and Alasdair Allan had a majority of more than 600, which in percentage terms was a significantly higher majority than mine. Liam McArthur has said a lot of nonsense.

Liam McArthur: It is not just me who has made the argument; across Orkney, the anger that people have felt at what they see as a lack of

basic fairness on the part of the SNP has not diminished over the years.

Orcadians have been fobbed off with various excuses in that time. First, we were told that Orkney would get RET after completion of the so-called pilot. Ministers then insisted that RET would push up prices on Orkney's routes. That assertion was contradicted by the Government's own calculations. Finally, there was concern that RET would divert traffic away from the Stromness to Scrabster route. The minister has been fairly relaxed about seeing that happen over the past month and previously when the Hamnavoe was sent to Bergen to satisfy the First Minister's thirst for a headline.

Throughout, the impression has been that SNP Government policy has been driven by political considerations rather than a desire for consistency or fairness. I sympathise with the communities in the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree, which now feel let down, but we are seeing the inevitable consequence of a Government approach that has always been about the next election—or referendum—and not about putting in place long-term, sustainable arrangements for what are, after all, lifeline services to our island communities.

I turn to the more recent concerns that have arisen from the Hamnavoe's serious engine failure at the end of last month.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: No, I will not.

Lessons need to be learned. The minister acknowledges that in his amendment and he accepted that during his visit to Orkney last Friday. Improvements are needed in communications, not just with the travelling public but with the wider community. Many are directly affected, as the minister heard from the Orkney tourism group representatives last week.

Wider questions are also being asked about the contract that was specified, negotiated and agreed between the Government and Serco. For example, all the details of the ferry replacement and redeployment provisions in that contract have been redacted from the version that appears on the Transport Scotland website. That is unfortunate, particularly as other bidders recall being asked to make specific provision in that regard during their negotiations with officials. I hope that the minister can shed more light on that in his closing remarks or in response to the freedom of information request that I have submitted.

I think that it is generally recognised that alternative tonnage is not readily available, but

again questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the financial penalties that are in place. They appear to be dwarfed by the subsidy that Serco receives from the Scottish Government. Even if it is accepted that efforts were made to source a replacement for the Hamnavoe, it is difficult to argue that the contract's penalty regime acts as any sort of incentive.

On the efforts to secure a replacement vessel, can the minister advise members on the reasons why it was decided not to proceed with redeploying the Hebridean Isles, for example? He will be aware that, earlier in the month, there was a strong suggestion that that vessel would be available, and it certainly would have provided more suitable passenger and freight capacity than MV Helliar.

It would be wrong for me to conclude without putting on record my gratitude for the work that has been done by many NorthLink staff over the past very challenging few weeks. I also acknowledge the efforts of Andrew Banks and Pentland Ferries staff in responding to the additional pressures that have been placed on their service. However, the minister must now accept that the description of the Stromness to Scrabster route as a lifeline service looks rather incongruous after the events of the past month.

Lessons need to be learned for the future, but answers are also required to the many questions that my constituents still have about the way in which the matter was handled and the effectiveness of contingency arrangements agreed between the Scottish Government and Serco.

I move amendment S4M-06658.1, to insert after "island communities":

"; regrets the decision by the Scottish Government not to include any ferry routes serving the Northern Isles in either the pilot phase of the road equivalent tariff project or its subsequent roll-out".

16:09

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for keeping ferry services on the political agenda.

Although the motion is about more than RET, there is no doubt that the CalMac Ferries staff pay cuts, the impending industrial action and the problems relating to the catastrophic failure of the Hamnavoe are worthy of debate, given how important those lifeline services are to the communities that they serve.

My colleague Jamie McGrigor attended the TSSA union briefing last week. We have a lot of sympathy for the onshore staff, particularly those who face a reduction in their salary from £22,000 to £18,000.

We do not wish to take any side on this issue. Like others, we urge the minister to ensure that constructive talks take place between unions and management. Every member of staff has an important role to play, whether onshore or on a boat. We would not support strike action, which would affect ferry services to fragile island communities that are dependent on such services. We hope that a settlement can be reached soon.

The news of the mechanical failure on the Hamnavoe was devastating for all travellers, but it was not nearly as devastating as it could have been had there not been the alternative of the no-subsidy service across the Pentland Firth, run by Andrew Banks of Pentland Ferries, from St Margaret's Hope in Orkney to Gills Bay. I regret that the Government failed to thank Pentland Ferries in its amendment, but I listened carefully to the minister's speech and I think that there was almost some gratitude there, which I think Mr Banks is worthy of. He has ensured that people and traffic continue to cross the Pentland Firth despite the temporary loss of the state-subsidised service.

On the third issue in the Labour Party motion—RET—the Scottish Government's public relations approach to the cutting of RET in alleging that local hauliers did not pass it on is probably in the same category as Argyll and Bute Council's approach to Martha's meals, but the difference is that the council apologised to Martha, whose success in Malawi continues to grow. No such apology has been forthcoming for the Western Isles local hauliers. To blame them for not passing on the gains from RET to their customers was not only unfair and lacking in understanding of haulage costs but, predictably, it caused significant anger at the lack of empathy and understanding of the full impact on island communities and life.

We very much welcome the report by MVA Consultancy entitled "Impact of the Removal of RET Fares from Commercial Vehicles on The Western Isles, Coll and Tiree". It confirms that the removal of RET for commercial vehicles

"in April 2012 has had a significant negative impact ... on the volumes and margins of small hauliers ... squeezed the margin of trader-hauliers ... necessitated an increase in prices for network hauliers".

The figures are there for all to see. Comparing the period April to September for 2011-12 with the same period for 2012-13, we see that the Ullapool to Stornoway route had a fare increase of 50 per cent, a revenue increase of 22 per cent and a reduction in carryings of more than 18,000, which is an 18 per cent fall. For the same period on the Uig, Tarbert and Lochmaddy route, there was a fare increase of 50 per cent, a revenue increase of 32 per cent and a reduction in carryings of 7 per

cent. In addition, the carryings on the Oban to Coll and Tiree route were down by 17.5 per cent over the one year.

Perhaps the Scottish Government thinks that the percentage increase in revenue is more important than the percentage loss in crossings, even when that is at 17 per cent. If that is the case, the Government needs to look more closely at the socioeconomic analysis in its own report. I caution the Government to look at the jobseeker's allowance claimant count in the Western Isles, which is 2.9 per cent, compared with the Scottish figure of 3.9 per cent.

The historical issue of labour mobility from island to mainland is well documented. Were more jobs and opportunities available in the Western Isles, I have no doubt that many people would return home. I hope that the socioeconomic factors are given weighting equal to if not greater than the increases in revenue that I have referred to. The Government can find plenty of opportunities for efficiency savings in the public sector without having to enforce severe hardship by slashing wages for essential onshore staff.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now turn to the open debate, with speeches of four minutes.

16:14

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): First, let me say how delighted my island constituents are with the improvements to ferry services that the Scottish Government is delivering. Tomorrow, for example, there will be the first sailing for 75 years from Ardrossan to Campbeltown, which is a brand-new route that will be delivered three times a week. The MV Isle of Arran began on 6 May a five-month summer season, with sailings three times a day for five months of the year. That is a permanent fixture for the first time on that route. Of course, the Scottish Government plans to roll that out over a year, so we will have a significant increase in sailings.

In addition, road equivalent tariff will be rolled out to Arran from October next year, which will bring many more visitors and a great boost to Arran's tourism economy, and the island of Cumbrae, in my constituency, will benefit from RET before the end of the parliamentary session. Over the next decade, the Scottish Government, through Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, will invest £50 million to £56 million in two new vessels, which will come on stream in 2016-17 and 2022-23. Moreover, Brodick's £18 million harbour development is due to come on stream by December 2015.

I do not recall Labour supporting RET much, either in the run-up to 2007 or subsequently. Richard Baker body-swerved my intervention and

said that RET was in Labour's 2011 manifesto. That might be so, but it is only because Labour saw that RET was working well under the SNP. It took the SNP—not the Tories, not Labour and not the Liberals—to bring in RET. In February 2008, Labour's then transport spokesman, Des McNulty, said that the money should have been used to lower all ferry fares. In September of that year, he said that the policy was

"unfair, discriminatory and politically motivated."—[*Official Report*, 10 September 2008; c 10624.]

It is Labour's U-turn on the issue that is politically motivated.

Rhoda Grant: Will the member give way?

Kenneth Gibson: In a moment.

The Tories also seem to be converts to RET. As for the Lib Dems, in 2004 the Lib Dem Minister for Transport, Nicol Stephen, said:

"A road-equivalent tariff scheme would generate significant additional subsidy costs, which could be funded only by displacing high-priority transport projects. We have no current plans to introduce ferry fares based on road-equivalent tariffs."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 11 May 2004; S2W-7850.]

Councillor McNamara, the leader of the opposition in North Ayrshire Council, said that introducing the RET subsidy to the Western Isles meant robbing the taxpayers of North Ayrshire. Perhaps Rhoda Grant agrees with Councillor McNamara.

Rhoda Grant: I am listening to the nonsense that the member is talking. Does he genuinely expect us to believe that lower fares for all ferry travellers would not be a fair settlement?

Kenneth Gibson: It is difficult to see where the Labour Party is coming from. It wants to raid the money tree and says that we should have RET and lower fares on every route—as well as all the other commitments that it makes across the entire portfolio. One wonders where such a huge amount of money is meant to come from. I dare say that we will hear nothing whatever about that in the debate.

On the TSSA issue, I thank Elaine Murray for her work in organising the meeting and for her support for a motion that I lodged on the matter. Although the motion is in my name, I consider it to have been lodged jointly with Elaine Murray. It has been signed by 41 MSPs.

There is great concern among SNP members about the impact of a 25 per cent cut on Caledonian MacBrayne employees—as there would be about any employees facing such a cut. I support what Richard Baker said on the matter. I realise that there are two sides to the story and that CalMac says that cutting wages is about ensuring a healthy work-life balance, but I am not

convinced by that. Like the minister and other members, I want the dispute to be resolved in a positive way, as soon as possible and without diminution in pay for workers.

16:18

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Last month, the transport minister, Keith Brown, attempted to sneak out a damaging report that he himself had commissioned, which examined the impact of the removal of RET from commercial vehicles in the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree. The Scottish Government has looked into the effects of its own policy but refuses to admit that it got it wrong.

The removal of RET from commercial vehicles flew in the face of advice from local groups, such as the Outer Hebrides commerce group, which, prior to the report's release, had highlighted the negative impact that the policy would have. The report confirmed that the islands were negatively impacted by the Scottish Government's policy. Members have talked about the impact on hauliers, who were forced to increase prices to their communities. All that adds costs to households in the islands. The policy is basically the SNP's island tax.

Keith Brown: Will the member answer the question that Richard Baker would not answer? Given what she just said, is it the Labour Party's position that commercial hauliers throughout Scotland should be subject to RET? Is Labour making that commitment now?

Rhoda Grant: That would increase costs to some hauliers and some islands. What we want is a price structure that will allow the economy of our islands to grow. That has always been our policy. RET in some routes would increase prices, so we are not looking for that at all.

A number of local businesses in the Western Isles, such as Carranoch Shellfish, have directly linked the removal of RET from commercial vehicles to job losses in their area. The Western Isles Council has said that the RET report confirmed that the removal of RET from commercial vehicles had hit the islands' economy. It also showed that hauliers previously passed on the savings that they made from RET to consumers and that, since the removal of RET, prices have increased.

The Scottish Government should look again at the evidence laid before it in the report and act on it. All signs point towards the reinstatement of RET for all vehicles to the islands to protect and grow the island economies. The local businesses know it and the Scottish Government report shows it. When will the minister come clean, say that he got it wrong and reinstate RET in full?

Angus MacDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Rhoda Grant: Time is short, so I am not taking any further interventions because there are a couple of issues in our motion that I want to touch on.

The Orkney ferry service is highlighted in our motion. It was shown that there has been a lack of contingency planning in place when the engine of the MV Hamnavoe suffered catastrophic failure, halting the service since 25 April. One month later, it has not returned to service. Since the breakdown, no foot passenger service has operated on the route, damaging local businesses and tourism at a time when the economy relies on an influx of tourists and visitor numbers.

The Orkney folk festival starts tomorrow. Will the Hamnavoe run tomorrow? If not, what steps are being taken to ensure that foot passengers get there? Orkney relies on the service running; a month without it is entirely unacceptable. It is a lifeline service to Orkney's busiest ports, and we need contingency services available to avoid that happening again.

I have suggested previously that the Scottish Government introduce a standby vessel. The minister has said that the community in Lochboisdale and Mallaig would not want a ferry if it were taken off other routes. What can I say? Any ferry is better than no ferry at all. Instead of the tens of millions of pounds that the minister cited, he should perhaps go back to the community in Uist that is procuring for a fraction of the cost. Unfortunately, the Government removed that money from the table.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must conclude.

Rhoda Grant: I also echo comments members have made about staff salary cuts.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member must finish.

Rhoda Grant: I hope that the Government will urge CalMac to stop that retrograde step.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that members at the end of the debate may have to lose a bit of time.

16:22

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): The small isles ferry services to Rum, Eigg, Muck and Canna are in my constituency. Just fewer than 200 people live in those islands. The last time I took a trip to Rum, it took two days for a one evening meeting because of ferry scheduling and all the rest of it. It also meant a five-hour trip around all the small isles.

Although that was very enjoyable, it was stormy, so I was pleased that the MV Lochnevis is such a good sea boat.

New summer timetables have been introduced for the Lochnevis's trips to the small isles. There are trips to Eigg six days a week, and trips to Rum, Muck and Canna five days a week. That is an increase on the previous number of trips. When we get road equivalent tariff, the use of the ferries to the small isles and so on will increase. I look forward to that. We also have a new Sunday service to Rum, Canna, Eigg and Muck, which is a great improvement. There is also a ferry from Arisaig out to Eigg and Muck on a Sunday and there are sailings from Knoydart at 10:30 and 12:30 on a Sunday.

I mention that because we need to make the most of those sailings. RET will make it cheaper for people to get to the islands and it will boost our tourism and the economy. However, we must look at such things holistically; we must get the trains to arrive at Arisaig and Mallaig at about the same time—or just before, preferably—as the ferries are leaving for the small isles. Allan Henderson, the provost of Lochaber, has written to ScotRail about the matter. I ask the minister to tell us in his summing up whether he has had any discussions with ScotRail about the possibility of tying in—this summer, if possible—the times of the trains coming into Arisaig and Mallaig with the departures of the small isles ferries.

The new timetable for the small isles provides a very good service. The only thing that is missing is the ability for islanders to make a return trip to the mainland in the course of a normal working day—to get to the dentist or the doctor, to go shopping or to do other things that they might need to do. The ferries review suggests pretty major changes to achieve that—a new daily passenger small freight ferry with a roll-on, roll-off service for just two days a week. I do not think that that would be sufficient; we need more than that. It may well be that the best option is to keep the current enhanced service with the MV Lochnevis and to charter a passenger vessel, maybe fortnightly, to provide residents of the small isles with the ability to make a meaningful return trip to the mainland in the course of a normal working day. I would value the minister's views on that.

The advantage of the Lochnevis is that it has a cafeteria and is a comfortable boat. People who have to spend five hours on it in stormy weather, as I have done, feel quite relaxed and safe because it is such a good boat for that part of the world and the waters there.

I will quickly touch on the staff situation. I was at the meeting with the TSSA that Elaine Murray called, for which I thank her. We got cross-party support there and motion S4M-06510 has cross-

party backing. It is just a pity that the issue that it concerns could not have been separated out from the motion that is being debated today, or we might have got cross-party support across the chamber for it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to a conclusion, please.

Dave Thompson: I think that I have just run out of time.

16:26

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): RET has been expanded and will be expanded across various other parts of our services because the pilot scheme is being rolled out. Of course, it is not perfect. We have learned about the concerns of large commercial hauliers in the Western Isles, and of the smaller ones, as well. My colleague, Alasdair Allan, said:

“the real unresolved issue, which the report highlights, is the need to find a system of charging ferry fares ... that is equitable across both small and large companies, and which is consistent across the whole ferries network.”

I agree with that and I believe that the Scottish Government can find a system and improve the scheme.

As far as the cuts and the Western Isles are concerned, the RET's cloth has been cut because of cuts from Westminster. We have also seen a downturn in traffic in a particular year, as was mentioned by the Conservative spokesperson. We recognise the general trade downturn in visitors and many others who use the services. Therefore, we should be very careful before saying that the whole issue is down to cuts to RET.

In 2005, I asked Nicol Stephen questions about bringing in RET across many of the routes that we are talking about. Of course, like too many others, he concluded that

“RET would require very significant increases in subsidy.”

That answer demonstrates the boldness of the SNP Government in making sure that some improvements have been made in services in the Western Isles, the Inner Hebrides and now in the Clyde to help to start to improve circumstances.

Liam McArthur: Will Rob Gibson take an intervention?

Rob Gibson: I will not at the moment, thank you. I have heard Liam McArthur already.

I turn to the present situation regarding ferries and engine breakdowns. We have had the Clansman and the Isle of Lewis, and we have now had the Hamnavoe. The older vessels get, the more likely it is that they will have large

breakdowns. That is not a “debacle”; it is a factor of age.

It should also be noted that very soon, at the end of this month, I am due answers from the minister to a written question about days lost and journeys lost since 2010. Looking back, we see that weather cancellations alone in 2006-07 meant that 104 journeys were lost. In 2007-08 the number was 62 and in 2008-09 it was 69. In 2009-10, which was an excellent year, only 14 journeys were lost. That was just on the Scrabster to Stromness route. The basic fact is that weather problems create as much difficulty as the month that has been lost because of the Hamnavoe's unavailability. I hope that we can get those answers, so that we can have a rational review of the matter, not the “debacle” that was discussed earlier.

I support the seven Ullapool staff—the outport clerks—five of whom are full time, one of whom is part time and one of whom is full time in season and part time out of season. I signed the motion that Kenny Gibson lodged. I am delighted to say that those staff have support across the Parliament, but CalMac must speak to them and sort the issue out internally. We are not going to get any proper working relationship across the CalMac area until that happens.

16:30

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased that the Labour Party has brought this debate on ferry services to Parliament today. The timing could not have been better, given the recent and worrying proposals by CalMac Ferries to cut port staff's wages by up to 25 per cent. The issue is of great concern to employees, which is why I will focus on it in my speech.

CalMac's outline proposals to cut the terms and conditions of employment of clerical staff, as stated in our motion, would see their hours remaining the same or increasing while most premiums would be scrapped, which would in effect bring about a pay cut of up to 25 per cent. Although CalMac is offering a buyout, that would offer protection and mitigate the cuts for only 18 months. We are talking not about the highest-paid staff, but about some of the lowest-paid staff in the company. There seems to be no logic to why clerks are being targeted.

The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association estimates that more than 70 per cent of clerks are women, many of whom are currently the main breadwinners in their households. I, too, attended the event that has been mentioned by other members so that I could hear how the cuts would affect the staff and their families. One woman said that she stands to lose up to £600 a month. She is

the main wage earner in her family and they are already struggling financially. If her pay is cut, she will not be able to afford to pay the bills or the mortgage. Another employee spoke about how he stands to lose the equivalent of his annual mortgage payment. Many of the staff live in areas where there are no alternative jobs available.

Those are the same staff who, in 2012-13, helped CalMac to achieve technical reliability and punctuality levels of almost 100 per cent and 100 per cent in customer service efficiency, but who are being rewarded with pay cuts. Does CalMac still expect to achieve those levels if it undervalues the staff who meet and greet its passengers?

Keith Brown: I want to be helpful and to pass on some additional information. The member may know that the TSSA has responded to the CalMac proposals with its own counterproposals, which are currently being considered by CalMac, and constructive dialogue is going on just now.

Margaret McDougall: I thank the minister for that intervention, which probably throws my whole speech out. Nevertheless, I will continue with some of it.

Many staff have to stay on if a ferry is delayed, and they do so willingly to ensure that passengers reach their destinations, but it seems that CalMac has no regard for that commitment and dedication.

There seems also to be no economic or business case for the cuts. The company made a pre-tax profit of £4.1 million in the financial year 2012-13 and paid back £5.8 million to the Scottish Government through the clawback mechanism.

Staff do not want to strike, but they currently feel that it is the only option left to them.

The minister says in the motion that he supports both the union and the employer, but CalMac is part of David MacBrayne Ltd of which the Scottish Government is the sole shareholder. I take into account what the minister has said, but I ask him to intervene and to meet both sides to ensure that a solution is found quickly so that the future and finances of the valuable employees are secured, so that they can be assured that they will not face these outrageous, life-changing and demoralising pay cuts, and so that ferry services are not disrupted.

16:34

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I declare an interest in that my wife works part time for Caledonian MacBrayne, although she is not affected by the current dispute.

I will focus my short speech on a couple of the issues that have been raised, which are pertinent to West Scotland. The minister's amendment

highlighted the £331 million of planned investment up to 2015. That figure takes into consideration many aspects of ferries policy, one of which is construction of ferries. The Scottish Government deserves some credit for the £20 million-plus that has been invested in the two hybrid ferries that have been built at Ferguson Shipbuilders Ltd in Port Glasgow. The first, the MV Hallaig, was launched in December last year and the second, the MV Lochinvar, is being launched tomorrow. Those orders have safeguarded 75 jobs and created around 100 new jobs and up to 20 new apprenticeships. That was a tremendous economic boost to the Inverclyde economy and saw the first ship in five years being launched on the lower Clyde.

When the Scottish Government announced in November 2011 that those orders were to go to Ferguson's in Port Glasgow, the news was warmly welcomed. The comments in the *Greenock Telegraph* online were incredible. One of them was:

"Real jobs. Absolutely magnificent. Well done to all concerned."

It is important to highlight that those are the world's first diesel-electric ferries and that they were designed in Scotland. I repeat: they are the world's first. Everyone in Parliament can unite in celebrating that.

The second issue on which I will touch is the pay dispute between Caledonian MacBrayne and some of its staff who are represented by the TSSA. Unfortunately, I could not attend the lobby that took place in Parliament last week, but I signed the motion in the name of my colleague Kenneth Gibson. As others have, I have been contacted by the TSSA on the matter and I wrote to Caledonian MacBrayne to establish its position regarding the dispute.

It is disappointing that the dispute has reached the stage that it has reached. It is incumbent on Caledonian MacBrayne and the TSSA to continue their discussions. I note the comments that the minister made a few moments ago, but it is really important that the discussions continue until there is a satisfactory outcome.

I do not imagine that any business would want to amend staffing contracts lightly, but I believe that attempting to do so is a retrograde step. I hope that Caledonian MacBrayne refrains from proceeding with its proposals.

16:37

Liam McArthur: I thank Richard Baker again for bringing the debate to Parliament. Given its importance to Orkney and the constituents whom I represent, I am prepared to forgive him for denying me the opportunity to attend the all-

energy exhibition and conference in Aberdeen and to join others in celebrating the 10th anniversary of the European Marine Energy Centre.

In my opening speech, I made clear the anger that is still felt in Orkney—and, indeed, in Shetland—at the exclusion of our ferry services from the Scottish Government RET scheme. The scheme was initially targeted at the key SNP constituency of the Western Isles during a pilot phase that broke all records for duration, but which was suspiciously extended so as not to expire just before the Scottish Parliament elections in 2011. Even when it came to rolling out the scheme more widely, ministers felt inclined to include only routes on the west coast, including in Mr Gibson's constituency.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Excuse me, Mr McArthur. Minister, could you sit down, please?

Liam McArthur: There seems to be no credible justification for that discrimination. The ever-changing reasons that ministers advance for Orkney's and Shetland's exclusion serve only to reinforce the impression that it is all about politics, and not the desire to put in place an equitable or sustainable system.

The lack of sustainability is now giving rise to anger among hauliers in the west coast communities who find themselves being turfed back out of the scheme. By framing ferries policy on the basis of political and electoral calculations, ministers have not only hoist themselves by their own petard but have managed to take a great many haulage businesses with them.

I know from speaking to businesses in my constituency—notably in the tourism sector—that, in the meantime, the availability of RET on west coast routes but not to and from the northern isles has resulted in a loss of potential business over recent years.

A number of members commented earlier on the approach that Nicol Stephen took. However, I observe that, when he introduced the air discount scheme as the Minister for Transport, he made it clear that it needed to be affordable and would apply across the network rather than have routes that he felt were expedient being cherry picked.

On the fallout from the problems that have been experienced by MV Hamnavoe, I note that the minister has been persuaded to downgrade his diagnosis from “catastrophic engine failure” to “mechanical failure” since I last raised the matter with him in Parliament.

As I said previously, lessons need to be learned. The minister's amendment insists that

“effective contingency arrangements ... are in place”,

but I do not think that he will have been left with that impression after his visit to Orkney last week. Notwithstanding the highly commendable efforts of NorthLink staff—and, indeed, the staff at Pentland Ferries—over the past month, questions remain about the contract that the minister and Serco signed last summer.

The scale of the fines that were imposed for failure to deliver what is a lifeline service seems to be small compared with the subsidy that is being paid by the Government. I accept that efforts to locate an alternative vessel were made, but it is not clear why certain options were not pursued successfully—notably in the case of the MV Hebridean Isles.

The minister will argue that Serco is painfully aware of the reputational hit that recent events have had on the company—it would be nice to think that that may yet prompt action in other areas. For example, Serco should again consider reinstating some of the middle-of-the-day sailings in order better to align its summer timetable with that of the tourist season in Orkney. The scale of the cut in sailings, which is sanctioned by the Government's contract, is unacceptable, and it works against the efforts of people in the tourism sector in Orkney to extend the shoulders of the season. As Rhoda Grant pointed out, the Orkney folk festival is starting. It also seems to be worth while to reconsider the reduced discount for elderly, disabled and student passengers.

The services that we have been discussing are lifeline services, on which the islands that I represent rely. My constituents can accept that disruption to services happens from time to time, whether as a result of weather or because of mechanical problems. However, they expect to be dealt with fairly, equitably and honestly. For the reasons that I have set out, I believe that they have every right to feel let down by the Government's approach.

16:41

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The Conservatives will support Liam McArthur's amendment at decision time, but we will not support the amendment from Keith Brown. That is not because we have a particular opposition to any aspect of what the Government is doing on ferry policies; it is simply that we recognise the fact that there is a significant issue over how ferries are managed across Scotland.

As is often the case, the Government is wrestling with difficulties that have been wrestled with by successive Governments at various times. There are some things that the Government has chosen to do of which I am supportive. However, I

must take this opportunity to point out one or two problems.

The first issue that I wish to discuss is RET. Members have suggested that the Conservatives are somehow converts to RET. The truth is that RET has been discussed within Conservative ranks behind closed doors for many long years, but it has occasionally been dismissed on cost grounds. Jamie McGrigor has highlighted the problems that are associated with withdrawal of RET from road hauliers, simply in defence of that vital industry for our island communities, which has been put in a very difficult position by the Government's changes. RET was introduced in the Western Isles as a pilot scheme, but it was a promise that the Government appears to have been unable to keep.

Angus MacDonald: Will Alex Johnstone give way?

Alex Johnstone: No, thank you.

The first of the excuses that have been made is that there is somehow not enough money coming from the south. That is a poor excuse for anybody to make, and it could perhaps have been predicted by the minister who originally introduced the idea.

The other reason that has been given for the withdrawal of RET from the road haulage industry is that, according to statistics, the industry did not pass on the benefit. I suggest that the statistics that Mary Scanlon produced indicate that that apparent failure to pass on the benefit simply masks the fact that costs were rising quickly and that, the minute RET was removed from the road haulage industry, the effects on traffic and trade were immediately obvious to anyone who studied the figures closely.

I must also cover the issue of overall cost. That is a more general issue, and I will deal with it in a fairly abstract sense. When a public transport service is provided, whatever it is, there is a vital balance to be struck between the fare payer and the taxpayer as regards the cost of running the service. The cost of running our ferry services has significantly increased, which is partly due to the introduction of RET for reasons that I understand and believe may be justified.

The problem, however, is that the Government has failed to address the overall cost of providing ferry services in Scotland. That is highlighted by the fact that, with the breakdown of the Hamnavoe, the short crossing across the Pentland Firth has not been stopped altogether. It is continuing by virtue of the service that is provided by Pentland Ferries in an unsubsidised system.

The Presiding Officer: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Alex Johnstone: The opportunity to control the cost of ferry services by using Scotland's independent ferry sector is one that the Government must consider and use in the future to keep down the cost of vital services.

16:45

Keith Brown: I begin with the point that has just been made about Pentland Ferries. We very much appreciate the efforts of Andrew Banks, not just in relation to the business that he has taken on and the additional sailings, but in relation to the way in which he has managed his dry-docking arrangements to accommodate the additional passengers who want to use his service. However, like everyone else, he could have bid for the services that we put out to tender. He might well have considered doing that. We arrived at an open tender process in relation to NorthLink Ferries. The position is that we either subsidise and have that tender or we do not. I am not sure which option Alex Johnstone is saying that he prefers.

As for the points that Liam McArthur made, I have met him every time I have been asked to, given as much information as I can and provided answers to all the questions that he has asked. I have gone out of my way to ensure that he has as much information as possible. It is a disappointment, although it is perhaps inevitable, that that is usually followed by some very political statements.

I was more than happy to go to Orkney again to listen to the representations that people wanted the Scrabster to Stromness route to be written into the contract and that they wanted the 90-minute crossing. I was delighted to go again and talk to the council, the stakeholders and the tourism group. However, one bit of feedback that I got was that the constant politicising of these things by Liam McArthur is starting to annoy quite a number of people in Orkney. Perhaps he will want to address that. We heard some more of that cynicism in some of the comments that he made today, which is regrettable.

On the substantive point made by the Labour Party, I have now tried to find out from two Labour spokespeople whether Labour is committed to having a commercial RET for hauliers in the Western Isles or across Scotland. Of course, we know that, as was pointed out earlier, that would not apply in some cases, because it might increase fares for passengers, for example in Shetland. However, the Labour Party has not said whether it is committed to that. People in the Shetland Isles, the northern isles and the Western Isles will notice that, having been given the opportunity to say that that is what it would do, Labour has not said that. I think that I know why it has not done so.

Labour has also not said that it would definitely guarantee a new ferry for Lochboisdale because, of course, that would cost between £20 million and £40 million, with about £3 million to £4 million every year in additional subsidy. People in the Western Isles can draw their own conclusions about why the Labour Party has made the point that it has made yet made no commitment to such a ferry. It suggests that Labour members are playing politics with the interests of people in the Western Isles and elsewhere.

Rhoda Grant: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: If the member wants to make an explicit commitment and say that Labour would bring in RET across the country for commercial hauliers and buy a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry, perhaps she will take the chance to say so now.

Rhoda Grant: I explained that point to the minister earlier. He obviously has not understood. Maybe I will explain it later in words of one syllable. However, will he go to the people of South Uist and get their costings for running a ferry service? They would do it an awful lot more efficiently than he would.

Keith Brown: Again, there was no answer from Rhoda Grant as to whether she will commit herself to what I described. If the Labour Party is not committed to it, what is it making a fuss about? That is the big question.

The motion is disparate. To go back to the Hamnavoe, I was asked what the contract says about unscheduled unavailability. The contract with Serco explicitly covers what will happen in the event of vessel failure. It is obliged to respond to that efficiently and effectively by making best use of its existing maritime expertise and industry contacts. That is a fairly standard provision in such contracts.

We have seen the efforts that Serco has made to get the Hamnavoe back as quickly as possible. As I mentioned when I said that I would try to update the Parliament, we have the chance that the Hamnavoe will come back into service tomorrow, which is a day earlier than was originally intended, because a great deal of work has been done. There is no question but that the failure was substantial. Playing with words such as “debacle” does no credit to the members who have done that.

Richard Baker: Will the minister take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No. I cannot, as I need to finish what I have to say.

A crank shaft had a major fault. I have seen it; it had a substantial fault right through it. That was fairly unusual and impossible to predict. Serco

dealt with it very well and got the vessel down to Rosyth to be repaired as quickly as possible. As Alex Johnstone said, the service has continued to run; I mentioned the various services that continue to run to Orkney. The situation is not ideal and we want to have the Hamnavoe back. People describe it as the Rolls-Royce service, despite some of the comments that have been made in the chamber today. It is described as an excellent service and people want to have it back as quickly as possible.

I hope that the MV Hamnavoe will be back tomorrow, but people have not been prevented from getting across to Orkney and businesses in Orkney—especially hoteliers—are keen to say that people should come to Orkney. There are a number of ways of getting across to Orkney by boat, and people should still come. After tomorrow, I hope that they can go across using the MV Hamnavoe.

The third element of Richard Baker’s motion relates to the TSSA. If an employer wants to make changes, it is absolutely right that it consults its workforce and the recognised trade unions. That is what has happened in this case. From what I understand, this is not about CalMac picking on a series of employees to reduce costs in that way. Of course, CalMac has one eye on the next contract and wants to ensure that it is in as good a position as possible to win that contract, but that should not be done at the expense of individual members.

I have said to CalMac and I have said publicly that I expect the trade unions to respond to the proposals that have been made—as they have now done by responding with their own proposals, which CalMac is considering. That dialogue should and must take place. I have asked for that to happen. We have all said that we want that issue to come to a satisfactory resolution.

We have not had much mention of it today, but Kenneth Gibson mentioned the £45 million new vessel that will operate between Ullapool and Stornoway. That is a massive investment. The current ferry budgets are at a record high, although members would not think it from some of the speeches around the chamber. There is a record amount of investment and of course tomorrow the new Ardrrossan to Campbeltown service will run, for the first time in 75 years.

16:51

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I was interested to hear the minister welcome the opportunity to discuss the MVA Consultancy report on RET on commercial vehicles in the Western Isles, because Labour asked for a ministerial statement on that report and it was refused. Of

course, the minister made a statement to Parliament on NorthLink Serco's failure to maintain a lifeline service from Scrabster to Stromness because repairs were required to the MV Hamnavoe. However, we felt that the Parliament should be discussing a number of other issues to do with ferries. That is why we brought what the minister described as a "disparate" motion to the chamber—because we were refused the opportunity of a ministerial statement.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): Might the Labour Party have considered using the time that it had the week before it asked for that statement to discuss the issue?

Elaine Murray: It was an appropriate matter for a statement and we had other important issues that we wanted to discuss two weeks ago, as the Minister for Parliamentary Business will probably recall. The Minister for Transport and Veterans came to Parliament on 24 April with a statement on the Scottish Government policy on canals, which, to be frank, was a fairly flimsy document that told us that canals were an asset to the country and that Scotland should make the most of them—something that not one of us across the chamber could possibly disagree with—and yet when we asked for a statement on ferries and some of the important issues, it was refused. It therefore fell to Labour—as it did in the case of the Edinburgh to Glasgow improvement programme—to ensure that important transport issues were brought to the chamber for debate.

One of those important issues, of course, was the MVA Consultancy report—rather delayed in its publication—which had been published. After the report's publication, one of the minister's SNP colleagues—the Western Isles MP Angus Brendan MacNeil—apparently accepted that commercial RET had been beneficial to communities and that it was "regrettable" that the SNP Government had imposed increases. That is one of the SNP MPs who seems to believe that.

On 23 February last year, the Government amendment to a Labour motion on the issue asserted that

"only 7% of hauliers passed the full benefits on to consumers"

and, in his closing speech, Mr Neil stated:

"a lot has been made of the hauliers not agreeing with the Scottish Government when we say that the benefits to the hauliers of RET were not passed on. It is not the Scottish Government that says that; it is the hauliers."

He then said that I

"should listen to this and ... be educated."—[*Official Report*, 23 February 2012; c 6539.]

Perhaps it is he or his successors who should listen to the results of the MVA Consultancy study that the Scottish Government commissioned and then delayed publication of for several months. As others have said, the MVA study found that the introduction of RET had a positive impact for local businesses and that the removal of RET for commercial vehicles had significant negative impacts on hauliers and a variety of businesses across the islands, with businesses in the primary sector affected most.

If Mr Neil was correct in stating that hauliers were not passing on the benefits of RET, how could its removal possibly have had such an effect—which Mary Scanlon and Rhoda Grant have detailed—on businesses across the islands? Perhaps Mr Neil—or Mr Brown or Ms Sturgeon on his behalf—would like to apologise for his assertion.

Kenny Gibson listed a number of new routes in his constituency and spoke about the benefits of RET to his constituents; I wondered whether he was trying to prove the point that Liam McArthur made in his opening speech. Rob Gibson suggested that the results of the MVA Consultancy report were due simply to trade downturns, but that rather suggests that the consultants were incompetent in producing their report, in which the Government had specifically asked them to investigate the effects of the RET reduction on commercial vehicles. I doubt that the consultants that were employed were so inefficient that they could not do that.

As other members have said, I hosted a drop-in session on 8 May on behalf of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association to discuss CalMac's proposals to reduce the salaries of around 70 port staff by approximately 25 per cent. That would be the result of a number of proposals to remove weekend working premiums, night work payments and annual holiday bonuses and to cut shift allowances. There was also a proposal to change rostering, which would increase the working week's length by two hours.

Other members, such as Margaret McDougall, detailed CalMac's proposals for service changes, and the employees at the meeting told us about the effects that the proposals would have on them, their salaries, their ability to pay their mortgages and their standards of living—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. There are far too many conversations going on.

Elaine Murray: Indeed, some of the employees said that they would no longer be able to afford to pay their mortgage or use a car to get to work, despite the excellent service that they have provided to their employers over the years.

At that time, the TSSA expected to meet CalMac management on 15 May. I was pleased, as I think that all of us who were at that meeting were, by the genuine cross-party support for the workers. Members of four parties—four political groupings in the Parliament—were present, and every single person who was there expressed their support for the workers. We felt that the best way in which we could express our support for the TSSA members was to lodge a motion, which Kenny Gibson kindly offered to do on behalf of all the MSPs. We hoped that the TSSA members would be able to take that motion with them to the meeting with CalMac in order to demonstrate the cross-party support for them, and I was pleased to hear that 41 signatures to the motion have now been recorded.

Margaret McDougall was right when she advised us that CalMac is no ordinary company. It is the principal subsidiary of David MacBrayne Ltd, which is wholly owned by Scottish ministers, and it provides services under public service contracts with the Scottish Government, for which it receives a grant. We therefore ask the minister to join MSPs on all sides of the chamber in saying to that publicly owned company that it is unacceptable for it to treat its workforce in such a manner and to reduce its staff's wages by 25 per cent.

I was pleased to hear the minister say in his intervention on my colleague Rhoda Grant that CalMac is considering the TSSA's counter proposals. I hope that the message comes out of the debate that all members oppose the imposition of such conditions on the workforce and that we would not expect hard-working employees to be treated in that way.

On the NorthLink issue, Keith Brown told us in a statement to Parliament last year that

“One change that users ... will ... appreciate”

with Serco taking over the contract

“is that Serco NorthLink is taking a fresh approach to vessel overhauls”.

He said that he understood that

“during the winter there will be no interruption to services, in contrast to the long dry-dock period of last year.”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2012; c 11050.]

That raises the question whether that “fresh approach” and cost cutting by Serco led to the problems that we have discussed today.

Liam McArthur raised important questions about the contract that Scottish ministers agreed with Serco and whether the same requirements were placed on other bidders.

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to bring your remarks to a close, please.

Elaine Murray: I thank members for the opportunity to discuss those three important issues. I appreciate that the debate has been short, but it is important that the message goes out to CalMac about the changes in wages and conditions that the company is trying to impose on its workforce.

Business Motions

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06672, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for Thursday 23 May.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 23 May 2013—

delete

2.30 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Forth Road Bridge Bill

followed by Final Stage Proceedings: The National Trust for Scotland (Governance etc.) Bill

and insert

2.30 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Forth Road Bridge Bill

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Coal Industry Sector Taskforce

followed by Final Stage Proceedings: The National Trust for Scotland (Governance etc.) Bill

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Energy Bill - UK Legislation—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06671, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 28 May 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Equal Opportunities Committee Debate: Having and Keeping a Home, Steps to Preventing Homelessness among Young People

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Implementing Scottish Law Commission Reports

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Membership, Standing Order Rule Changes

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 May 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Ensuring Access to High Quality Sustainable Services for People Living with Chronic Pain

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 May 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Transforming Scotland's Railways

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 4 June 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 5 June 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Justice and the Law Officers;
Rural Affairs and the Environment

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 June 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.30 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06673, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for the stage 2 consideration of the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 7 June 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments. I call Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S4M-06674, S4M-06675 and S4M-06676.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Rules of Procedure in Children's Hearings) Rules 2013 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Review of Contact Directions and Definition of Relevant Person) Order 2013 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 Modification Order 2013 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Keith Brown on ferry services is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-06657.1, in the name of Keith Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06657, in the name of Richard Baker, on immediate action at the Haudagain roundabout, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (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, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Therefore, the amendment is agreed to and the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur falls. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, that relates to an amendment to the next motion. Let me read that again.

On amendment S4M-06657.1, in the name of Keith Brown, the result of the division is: For 66, Against 46, Abstentions 0. Therefore, the amendment is disagreed to. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, the amendment is agreed to. I am having a really bad day today.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question—let us get this one right—is, that motion S4M-06657, in the name of Richard Baker, on immediate action at the Haudagain roundabout, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now, and I will try to get this right.

For

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

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (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)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)

Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the end of the legal challenge against the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) and the progress that is being made to construct this vital route, with a swift move to procurement and the undertaking of essential preparatory works; commends the Scottish Government for confirming that it will pay for the Haudagain improvements, including the necessary compulsory purchase and compensation for those properties required to construct the improvements; recognises that attempting to re-engineer this junction prior to the opening of the AWPR would result in traffic chaos, severely constraining the economy of Aberdeen and the north east during construction; notes that all potential solutions identified by Aberdeen City Council require the delivery of a third Don crossing, something that has been opposed by Labour councillors and MSPs; further recognises that, in order to undertake the works at Haudagain, existing households will be relocated and the Scottish Government is working closely with Aberdeen City Council to ensure the relocation of vital services, such as the Middlefield Community Project and the Middlefield Healthy Hoose, to appropriate accommodation, and believes that this needs to be done sensitively and with compassion in a realistic timescale and with appropriate consultation.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-06658.2, in the name of Keith Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06658, in the name of Richard Baker, on ferry services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (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)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Therefore, the real amendment in the name of Liam McArthur falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-06658, in the name of Richard Baker, on ferry services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (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)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the implementation of road equivalent tariff (RET) to Islay, Colonsay and Gigha in October 2012 and the decisions to roll out RET to Arran in October 2014 and to all the Clyde and Hebrides routes in the current parliamentary session; further welcomes the planned investment of £333.1 million between 2012-13 and 2014-15 in Scotland's ferry services, including an additional £2.5 million in 2012-13, and £2 million in 2013-14, to support hauliers to the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree, where fare increases have also been capped and small commercial vehicles benefit from the same fares as ordinary motorists, all against a backdrop of falling budgets from the UK Government; also welcomes the firm commitment to providing a high-quality ferry service across the Pentland Firth as part of the overall Northern Isles ferry service and the effective contingency arrangements that are in place following the mechanical failure that has affected the MV Hamnavoe; further welcomes the commitment of all parties to learn lessons from this incident to provide good, clear and effective communication with ferry users, and notes that, while the ongoing dispute with some of Caledonian MacBrayne's port staff is a matter between the employer and the unions, it supports both parties in seeking an early resolution to avoid any impact on ferry services on Clyde and Hebrides routes.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-06674, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (Rules of Procedure in Children's Hearings) Rules 2013 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-06675, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Children's Hearings

(Scotland) Act 2011 (Review of Contact Directions and Definition of Relevant Person) Order 2013 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-06676, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 Modification Order 2013 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time—I am away for a lie down.

National Tree

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-06190, in the name of Joan McAlpine, on a national tree. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the significance of the Year of Natural Scotland; understands the importance of creating a legacy from this year, given the loss of woodlands through climatic changes and environmental degradation; recognises the importance of trees and woodland to the environment and people in South Scotland and across the country, and notes calls for the declaration of an official national tree after due public consultation as an important symbol of commitment to woodlands, to bio-diverse reforestation and, more generally, to a greener Scotland.

17:09

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I was lucky enough to spend this morning at Butterdean wood in East Lothian with a group of delightful four and five-year-olds from the Compass School in Haddington. With the help of the Woodland Trust, which owns Butterdean, the children joined me in planting Scots pine saplings to highlight the debate.

Representatives of the Woodland Trust are in the gallery, along with representatives of the Scottish Woodlot Association, Scottish Environment LINK, the RSPB and the Borders Forest Trust. They all support the campaign for a national tree, as do Trees for Life, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the John Muir Trust and the Royal Scottish Forestry Society.

It was wonderful to share the children's excitement. Woodlands are the most stimulating playgrounds of all. There was much chatter about whether we might spot a gruffalo. Apparently, it was lying low today, but the children had a great time with their saplings and spades.

Woodlands foster a sense of wellbeing for people of all ages—that is scientifically proven. In fact, Forestry Commission Scotland has a highly successful project called branching out that offers patients a therapeutic programme of activities from simply walking in the woods to building bird boxes and clearing rhododendrons.

As a child, I was of the generation that planted a tree in 73, which was a massive United Kingdom drive to make good the devastation of Dutch elm disease. I still remember the excitement of getting our very own sapling. At that time, there were very few trees in our housing scheme, which was made up of the 1950s pebbledash houses that are typical of post-war urban Scotland. Now the trees

that we planted are mature—as, unfortunately, am I—but the greenery has transformed Midton in Gourrock into something of a leafy suburb. Trees give a sense of place and of permanence.

Perhaps it was that childhood memory that attracted me to Alex Hamilton's petition, which calls on the Parliament to

"urge the Scottish Government, as a symbolic commitment to our woodlands and natural heritage, to proclaim the Scots Pine as the National Tree of Scotland."

I point out that that demand is non-political—we are asking for a national tree, not a nationalist tree—so I would welcome clarification from the minister of the civil servant's letter to the Public Petitions Committee that seemed to suggest that we must await the outcome of next year's referendum before we make a decision.

Scotland is already a nation, and we can choose appropriate symbols whenever we want—we already have the saltire and the thistle, of course. This year of natural Scotland is an ideal time to name our nation's tree. I must admit that I originally thought that legislating on the matter was a bit like using a sledgehammer to crack a pine cone, if members will pardon the pun, but it seems that, around the world, that is how it is done. The maple was proclaimed the official tree of Canada only in 1996, and in the United States there were three resolutions in the House and Senate before a bill was signed by the President in 2003 that elevated the oak to the status of the American eagle.

What is the point of having a national arboreal emblem, as they prefer to call it across the Atlantic? Well, it gets people talking, and if that talk leads to action in preserving and planting woodland, it can help to combat climate change. In the last century, global forest cover dropped from 50 per cent of the world's land area to 30 per cent. I know that the Scottish Government has a very ambitious target for planting, so any interest that helps to support that objective must be good.

Woodland also supports wildlife. The Galloway forest park in my region is home to red kite, barn owls and golden eagles. The remnants of the ancient Caledon forest further north shelter the capercaillie, the unique Scottish crossbill and mammals such as the pine marten, and, of course, the red squirrel, which we all love, survives in pockets across Scotland, thanks to our forests.

Woodlands are vital to the rural economy. The forestry industry is an economic success story that we do not shout about often enough. I know that the minister was as impressed as I was with the advanced technology that we saw at the James Jones & Sons sawmill in Lockerbie when we visited it a few months ago.

Woodlands are vital to tourism. They form the backdrop to increasingly popular activity holidays. The Seven Stanes mountain bike trails in the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway are a great example of that growth area.

If we think globally for a moment, designating a national tree would help the country to enhance its international brand. Although that brand is already very strong, there is no reason why we cannot strengthen it further. In my view, the Scots pine seems ideal for that purpose. It is named after us, at least in the English-speaking world, and, unlike the birch and the oak, it has not been claimed by anyone else.

Aesthetically, the strong silhouette of the Scots pine lends itself to graphic reproduction and, of course, it features in many famous paintings and photographs of Scotland's landscape.

The Scots pine came top of the Woodland Trust's online poll to find a national tree and I can exclusively reveal that it is the front-runner in a separate poll that is being conducted by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh for the year of natural Scotland. The Scottish Forestry Commission's submission to the Public Petitions Committee noted that the image of the pine is the most downloaded from its website.

The Scots pine has many legendary properties and was planted on the graves of fallen Celtic warriors in ancient times. However, it is also modern. It comes in many guises; it can be tall and straight or broad and spreading with multiple trunks, and its bark ranges in colour from orange and red to grey. Although its presence here goes back to the ice age, it is a perfect representative of today's diverse modern Scotland in all its variety.

The pine also encourages a unique biodiversity. If anyone wants to know more, I recommend that they consult the Trees for Life website, which talks about the Scots pine canopy encouraging blaeberrys, cowberries and even rare orchids in the shade of the trees.

The Scots pine is iconic. Although it does not grow naturally elsewhere in the United Kingdom or indeed Ireland, it is the most widely distributed conifer in the world, stretching from Scandinavia to southern Spain and from Ardnamurchan to eastern Siberia. In that respect, it evokes the Scottish human diaspora, which is also widely scattered, and would therefore be a perfect ambassador for a country whose people have made such a mark on this world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Patricia Ferguson to be followed by Rod Campbell. As we are quite tight for time, I must ask for four-minute speeches.

17:16

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I thank Joan McAlpine for securing this debate on what is an interesting proposal. I must also apologise to her and the chamber, as other business requires me to leave after I have made my speech.

I, too, recognise the hard work and commitment of my constituent Alex Hamilton who, with the help of many of the organisations mentioned already, has championed the issue through the processes of the Public Petitions Committee and whose determination will, I hope, bear fruit. Sadly, Mr Hamilton cannot be with us today because, ironically, he is on one of the few places in Scotland without any trees at all: the island of St Kilda.

I have to say to Joan McAlpine that we on this side of the chamber are perhaps not as surprised as she is to find that a decision on the national tree of Scotland must await the referendum's outcome. Doesn't everything these days? In any case, given that Scotland has a national flower, why should it not have a national tree? Seventy other countries have already adopted a national tree, and some have even emblazoned it on their national flag.

We are a country proud of and famed for our natural heritage, and our scenery helps to promote Scotland as a tourism destination. Indeed, it is always one of the first things that people from overseas remark on when we say that we come from Scotland. As our fame as an outdoor sports destination grows, that picture of Scotland grows in the memories and minds of those who have visited. It would be fitting if there were to be a tangible legacy from the year of natural Scotland in the form of a national tree. I sincerely hope that the Scottish Government will agree to formally recognise such an iconic image for our country.

While doing some research for the debate, I noted Wikipedia's bold assertion that the Scots pine is the "national tree of Scotland". We know that that is not quite true, but it is interesting that such an assumption has been made. Frankly, I think that it is understandable. If any tree can symbolise the vision of Scotland's wild places that most people have, it must be the Scots pine. The fact that, as Joan McAlpine recognised, it comes in many sizes, shapes and colours perhaps chimes with our vision of a diverse Scotland in the modern world.

The pine would definitely be my choice for Scotland's national tree. However, as Joan McAlpine again has made clear, it is also the choice of those who took part in the Woodland Trust's online poll. Indeed, 66 per cent of those who participated opted for the Scots pine, with

only 20 per cent choosing the next most popular—the rowan. It seems that the Scots pine is certainly the favourite for that iconic role, although I agree with the motion that public consultation should take place before any decision is made to award the accolade to a particular tree.

Deforestation over the years means that the Scots pine is not as common as it once was. Over the past 300 years in particular, swathes of the trees have been cleared to make way for crops. The tree was in great demand as a source of pit props for the mining industry and for other industrial purposes. It is a hardy tree that can be found in many countries in northern Europe, although it ventures as far south as Portugal. It has a lifespan of between 150 and 300 years, although I understand that there are specimens in Sweden that are believed to be 700 years old.

The Scots pine can be grown commercially, but it is also an important part of our ecosystem. Many plants, birds, animals and insects depend on it. Indeed, I am indebted to Mr Hamilton, who provided very interesting information in his petition about the Scottish crossbill, which is a bird that lives only in pine forests and feeds on the scales of the pine cone.

Whether or not the Scots pine is recognised as our national tree, I would argue that it is already an iconic symbol of our country. I hope that the Scottish Government recognises that and will give it the recognition that it deserves.

17:20

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Joan McAlpine on securing a debate on the subject. Like her, I welcome the visitors from the Woodland Trust in the public gallery who are here to hear our debate.

Those of us in Scotland who want independence for our nation have always said that it is not about flags, anthems and symbols, but that is not to say that symbols have no significance. Symbols can serve to strengthen a nation's identity in many ways: historically and culturally in particular, or as simple logos. Who could mistake the symbolic eagles of the United States or Germany, which have become unquestionable markers on dollars and the German euro coin respectively? Who could mistake the Welsh dragon or the Welsh leek, and who could deny that the maple tree is inextricably linked to Canada? The Canadian brand and the maple brand complement each other. When we think of maple syrup, we think of Canada, and vice versa.

Scotland is one of the oldest nations in Europe, and we have our fair share of symbols. Scotland can be identified by the lion rampant, the thistle,

the unicorn or heather, to name but a few. At least three of those things are heraldic symbols that are connected with royalty or privilege, which arguably have much less influence and significance now.

In the digital age that we now live in, symbols can be easily transmitted and identified. I certainly do not subscribe to the view that a nation can have too many symbols—indeed, the more, the merrier. There is a good reason for having them. New symbols can bolster identity and a unique brand. We should not shy away from that in a globalised and increasingly homogenous world, particularly when the value of local, non-commercialised produce is being rediscovered by the public, for whom the once attractive mass-produced brand names are losing their charm.

It is clear to me that a strong case is being made for Scotland to formally adopt the Scots pine. In my North East Fife constituency, Tentsmuir forest and Tentsmuir national nature reserve border the coast between St Andrews and Leuchars. The area comprises some 50 square miles of woodland, which is predominantly made up of Scots pine and Corsican pine. Tentsmuir is perhaps one small pocket of something that is close to the ancient Caledonian pine forest habitat that once covered enormous swathes of Scotland, but which has sadly—in such cases, this is often inevitable—disappeared due to a combination of natural and man-made factors, most notably the clearance of woodland over the centuries for livestock grazing.

Tentsmuir forest is owned by the Forestry Commission, and the reserve is looked after by Scottish Natural Heritage. The area is used frequently by students of biology and geology at the University of St Andrews due to its rich biodiversity and preserved and restored sand dunes. The trees are home to a fascinating range of insects and birds, many of which are found only in Scotland and a few other places.

We know, of course, that in other parts of Scotland, Scots pine woodland is home to some of our rarest and most fascinating animals, such as the capercaillie. Without the environment that is provided by Scots pine forests, the capercaillie population, which is descended from birds reintroduced from Sweden, would possibly once again become extinct.

It may be a cliché, but the Scots pine is an inextricable part of the rugged mountainous beauty with which Scotland is identified—for better or worse—around the world. I know that the rowan tree has its admirers—some of us will remember the First Minister's vocal rendition of "The Rowan Tree" on a CD a few years ago. Notwithstanding that, I am sure that adopting the Scots pine as our national tree would serve only to strengthen the made in Scotland brand. Given the prevalence of

the species in every part of Scotland, it is right that it should be called our national tree.

I hope that the Scottish Government will give the matter further consideration, and I thank Joan McAlpine once again for bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:24

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Joan McAlpine for bringing the debate to the Parliament. As someone who loves the countryside and wildlife, I am very supportive of any initiative that recognises and seeks to promote our distinctive and beautiful Scottish environment. I am therefore not unsympathetic to the concept of a national tree for Scotland, although perhaps Ms McAlpine should not be too wafted away by that endorsement—I shall explain why.

I have form when it comes to promoting national things. Although that may have stopped short of promoting the Scottish National Party, it extended some years ago to promoting a national bird for Scotland. I was asked to take under my wing, as it were, promotion of the golden eagle. At that time *The Scotsman*, in conjunction with the RSPB, asked a number of people to adopt different birds, culminating in a poll in 2004 that the golden eagle won. I hope that members will indulge me in my recounting of this cautionary tale, because it is instructive for any desire to establish a national tree.

On the back of the poll victory, a petition backed by the RSPB was presented to the Parliament's Public Petitions Committee to establish the golden eagle as our national bird. In November 2004, the committee decided to write to the Scottish Executive to clarify the process for establishing a national bird—and the months passed. In June 2005, the committee agreed to approach the relevant minister, expressing concern at the lack of a response—and the months passed. In January 2006, some response must have been received, because the committee went back to the petitioner. In September 2006, the committee referred the petition to the Enterprise and Culture Committee. In October 2006, that committee took evidence and agreed to write to the Lord Lyon, the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport and VisitScotland to seek views on what effect the establishment of a national bird would have on tourism. I would have thought that the self-evident answer would be “pretty damn good”, but never mind.

On 5 December 2006, the Enterprise and Culture Committee agreed to take no further action on the petition and to notify the petitioners and inform the Public Petitions Committee of the decision.

Joan McAlpine: I thank the member for arming me with that kind of evidence, which I am sure will be very useful in the future. Is she aware that it took three goes in the American Senate and House of Representatives to get the American national tree through and that all three attempts were held up in committee? If the Americans can eventually get there, perhaps we can as well.

Annabel Goldie: I am encouraged by what Ms McAlpine says. There is certainly a lesson there about not being thwarted by adversity.

The final note before dismissing the petition on the national bird was that the Enterprise and Culture Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Executive to ask for clarification on the process and procedure for the establishment of a national symbol. Interestingly, that was pretty much what the Public Petitions Committee had done initially more than two years previously. The golden eagle is still not the national bird of Scotland.

That sorry tale was told not to discourage but to outline the pitfalls. Joan McAlpine has been wise to keep her motion non-specific about the type of tree, although her speech was perhaps a little more partisan. It is also important that neither the proposal nor the tree that is ultimately chosen, if that happens, be claimed by any one party. The proposal will work only if there is cross-party and broad-based support.

I observe that accepting a principle is only the start of a long and tortuous journey. From my experience, careful thought must be given to process. It has to involve wide public consultation and embrace public comment on the principle, because if the public do not want a national tree, the game's a bogey. However, if the public are supportive of that, there are other issues to clarify. The Lord Lyon may have views about the matter and there will need to be some mechanism by poll of constituting a short list of suitable trees and then inviting a national vote to establish a winner.

If we can do it to decide the name of a bridge over the Forth, surely we can do it to decide on a national tree. Would it be too much to hope that, one day, the golden eagle might sit on that tree as our national bird? I just might have to make that a prerequisite for my continuing support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much for that unusual imagery.

17:29

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate, as a means of helping to raise the profile of that wonderful tree, the Scots pine. For some people, it is the

“little white rose of Scotland”

that breaks the heart; for me it is the Scots pine.

I have yet to see a Scots pine that did not look just right in its setting. Scots pines hold my view and captivate me as few other trees do, and they brighten my travels across the Highlands and Islands, appearing now and then, like old friends. They make my heart pause and then beat a little quicker, and they make me smile. They look equally good in rain, mist, sunshine or snow, and they grow where few other things will grow. Their resilience is a symbol of the tough and enduring spirit of Scotland.

It is sad that all too few are left and that the old Caledonian forest is reduced to 1 per cent of what it once was. That is sad on a number of levels. We all know the stories of how the Caledonian forest was cut down and cleared, to make way for sheep and for other reasons. In Argyll, the wood was burned for charcoal for 100 years. Our Argyll woodlands supplied the cannonballs for Nelson's navy. It is interesting that the woodland that was adjacent to the Bonawe ironworks was not just harvested but well managed and conserved, but outwith the immediate vicinity of the works, the forest was felled with no thought for conservation. The woodlands were destroyed over a huge area and are gone.

In the place of the old Caledonian forest, we have spruce plantations, from which timber is exported for a few pounds a tonne. There is no local added value and, these days, there are few jobs. Man has been replaced by machine, and our local sawmills, unable to invest in new technology, are gone too. Spruce plantations are deadly for biodiversity. The loss of the old forest is sad for environmental and economic reasons, as well as sentimental reasons.

I have more reason than most people to value the fine Scots pine, for I have used its wood for joists and rafters, and for floorboards and furniture. The wood excels in all those uses. It is workable, enduring and attractive. I remember the sweet, aromatic smell as I cut into it. I remember the pink and creamy hues of newly sawn planks, which mellow gracefully with time. I remember the many pleasant hours that I have spent—and hope to spend—in the company of such wonderful wood.

I can think of no species more fitting than the Scots pine as our national tree. I can see that I have a few seconds left, so I will conclude on a poetic note:

"The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep."

17:33

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):
I thank Joan McAlpine for securing the debate.

I think that all members recognise the important role that symbols can play in the lives of the Scottish people. From the cross of St Andrew on the flag to the thistle on the jersey of our national rugby team, symbols can help to unite us across all society's divisions. Given that 2013 has been declared the year of natural Scotland, it makes sense for the Parliament to add to the collection of the nation's identifiable symbols by selecting a national tree.

I was fascinated to hear Joan McAlpine say that Canada adopted the maple as its national tree only in 1996. Like many Scots, I have relatives in Canada, and I proudly remember being five or six and wearing a wee brooch in the shape of a maple leaf, with the word "Canada" on it. I cannot believe that it has taken all this time for the maple to become the national tree of Canada, when the rest of the world already recognised that.

I was interested in how social media have picked up the idea of the tree. Radio Scotland's "Out of Doors" programme some week ago discussed alternatives, including the rowan tree, the gean, and the hawthorn. There was no doubt that the views of the listeners, and the tweets sent during the programme showed that far in the lead was the Scots pine.

The Scots pine is instantly recognisable. There is no other tree like it. It is strong, straight, tall, wily, hardy and independent—just like the Scots. The small distinctive copses are photographed endlessly as an image of Scotland.

As a regional member for the Highlands and Islands, I drive through many parts of Scotland where there are few or, sometimes, no trees. However, if there are trees, they are always Scots pines. They get where no other trees go—they sometimes grow out of the stone on a mountainside.

From a cultural perspective, the Scots pine comes in many colours and shapes, which symbolises the multicultural nature of Scotland. There is a Scots pine in Glen Loyne that is estimated to be 520 years old. Although that may not be as impressive as the Fortingall yew, it serves as a symbol for the resilience of the Scottish people.

Approximately 75 nations have officially recognised or unofficially adopted national trees. Each of the 50 states in the USA has its own tree. There is no reason why Scotland cannot join other nations in recognising a national tree. If anybody is in any doubt, reading the "The Cone Gatherers" by Robin Jenkins will give them the imagery, the

sense of the importance of the forest—literally, the seeding and reseedling of the tree—and how the Scots pine is important in our nation in so many ways. Here is to the Scots pine as our national tree.

17:37

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Joan McAlpine on securing the debate. I also congratulate Alex Hamilton, who is one of my constituents, on lodging the petition that inspired the debate.

As has been mentioned, RSPB Scotland, Trees for Life, the Woodland Trust, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the John Muir Trust—I could go on—are just some of the groups and organisations that have backed Mr Hamilton's request. Clearly, he has a knack of getting people and organisations with similar interests and passions together to achieve change. That fact that he has got me—an unreconstructed city boy who, in my earlier years, did not pay much attention to nature—speaking in the debate shows the strength of the idea of a national tree. I will say more about that later.

Rod Campbell talked about the importance of symbols. As a multinational state, the symbols of the United Kingdom's constituent countries tend to be recognised by general public agreement, rather than in any official way. The example of the national anthem is an obvious one. "Flower of Scotland" is widely recognised as Scotland's national anthem, although officially we share—for the moment—"God Save the Queen" with England, Wales and Northern Ireland. England and the United Kingdom also share a national tree—the pedunculate oak, which is more commonly known as the royal oak.

I am one of the MSPs who have made representations on behalf of Mr Hamilton to Paul Wheelhouse, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. I am sure that we will hear from him shortly on how he wants to progress the matter. Although there is no formal mechanism in place for designating an official national tree, that is not a reason not to do it. It can be done and it should be done, and with willingness it will be done.

The process to date has been constructive. It has certainly got people thinking about our natural world, and appreciating the wonderful wildlife and scenery of Scotland, which are two of our most internationally recognised assets. At times, some of us—as I said at the start of the debate, that includes me—can easily take that for granted.

Joan McAlpine mentioned the boost to our timber industry that having a national tree would bring, and others have said that it will reinforce Scotland the brand. I think that the process by

which we choose a national tree is just as important as the tree that we choose, so I would like to say a little about that.

As we have heard already, the Woodland Trust conducted a poll about what tree Scots would go for; two thirds went for the Scots pine, with the rowan coming second. I understand that the winner got 414 votes. I commend the Woodland Trust for that initiative, but I think that we will be talking about thousands of votes when we take the debate forward nationally on a structured and engaged level. That is the key bit that I would like to talk about. After we eventually decide on what our national tree will be, why not reaffirm that, say, every 10 years and let the people decide whether they wish to stay with the Scots pine, which seems to be the favourite, or whether they wish to replace that? In the time that I have left I want to talk about that process.

I would like to see our schoolchildren, for example, deciding what they prefer. Would they prefer the Scots pine, or would they think that perhaps it should be the birch, because the birch covers twice the area of Scotland that the Scots pine covers?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you draw to a close, please?

Bob Doris: Would schoolchildren reject the birch, because Finland and Russia already have it as their national tree?

Let us get people talking about it and engaged with the question. As I said, it started me thinking about something that previously I would not have thought about. Once again, I commend Joan McAlpine on bringing the debate to the chamber.

17:41

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I congratulate Joan McAlpine on securing time to debate this issue. I am very pleased to debate it in the year of natural Scotland, and I support any initiative to make Scotland greener and any commitment to our woodlands. We have heard from many members why it is so important, and from many organisations including the Woodland Trust, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Environment LINK and the John Muir Trust. Mike MacKenzie mentioned that Sitka spruce does not support indigenous wildlife, and I think that this is a very important step that we can take to ensure that our wildlife has every chance to thrive.

I hope that a national tree will be more than symbolic. Too-recent history has seen the trampling of a site of special scientific interest—one of the most protective of all designations. I believe that designations and titles should stand for something and should really mean something.

If having a national tree brings increased determination to protect our natural spaces and places for their inherent value, it is right that we should have one. It is right that we should celebrate a national tree, but while we focus on one tree we should also dwell on the interconnectedness of all our native species.

Scotland was once a forest land until human activities stripped it of almost all its ancient woodland. Of course, climatic change and environmental degradation have not helped. However, we will be far richer ecologically, culturally and financially if we increase our commitment to our native woodlands and forests.

I welcome the growing interest in community woodland and in community ownership of woodland, and in the sustainable harvesting of our forests. We produce timber for some of the most beautiful and sustainable furniture that one could possibly imagine—Mike MacKenzie alluded to that, too. Some of the furniture, houses and objects that are made by our most talented craftspeople are priceless objects without compare.

In recent times we have had outbreaks of ash dieback and dothistroma needle blight, which have raised awareness of the fragility and importance of our trees and forests, and of the need for safe, sustainable and sensible management and commercial practice. As a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I would like to highlight concerns that have been raised with me about threats to our forests and woodlands from large-scale biomass energy. With a growing human population, tensions over land use will continue, so it is important that we put down markers and state our commitment to our woodland.

The state of the world's natural forests is a matter of grave concern. Our native woodlands may be small in global terms, but they are distinctive and unique. Our old pinewoods are home to a distinctive range of native species. The "State of Nature" report that has just been published highlights the perilous state of many species, but there is hope. Awareness is increasing, and if we can increase awareness of the importance of our trees at garden level and at street level, and if we can have a renewed focus on and discussion of our trees, we can truly transform our neighbourhoods. Tourists flock to visit the Birnam oak and the Fortingall yew, as we have heard, and Commonwealth Orchard seeks to have fruit trees in all our streets.

Today, I have not focused on one tree—I am content to let the consultation take its course. However, if proclaiming a native tree as the national tree helps to protect and enhance interest in, and land devoted to, preserving and promoting

biodiversity, I am more than happy to support the initiative.

17:45

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): I am grateful to members for their valuable contributions to the debate.

Joan McAlpine's motion invites us to recognise the significance of the year of natural Scotland and—if she will forgive me for paraphrasing—also to create a legacy that would include

"the declaration of an official national tree after due public consultation".

In considering the motion and previous discussion of Alex Hamilton's petition on proclaiming the Scots pine a national tree, I have had a number of questions in mind. First, what is a national tree for? Secondly, what does it mean if we decide to adopt a national tree? Thirdly, what process should we go through—as Bob Doris and others have commented—if we were to choose and adopt a national tree? During the debate, we have had several extremely useful speeches that have helped to address those questions.

As Joan McAlpine said, and as other members have echoed, the designation of a national tree would help to highlight the value that we place on our trees, woods and forests. It would reinforce the messages that are associated with the year of natural Scotland, the primary objective of which is to highlight Scotland's wealth of fantastic natural assets. Trees are obviously a key part of that.

My second question is what it would mean if we were to adopt a national tree. Again, members have helped to answer that question, giving examples of how we could celebrate our national tree—for example, as part of our cultural heritage, for its contribution to our landscape and in educating children more about the environment in which they live. As part of the year of natural Scotland, we have already been able to inspire people to take more interest in our wildlife by identifying the big five that are being promoted through the SNH "Big 5" app—one is the golden eagle, and the others are the otter, the seal, the red deer and the red squirrel. Scots pine is a key species among the Caledonian native woodlands, which support the red squirrel, the pine marten, the capercaillie and the wildcat, as a number of members have mentioned.

Thirdly, we would need to consider the process for choosing and adopting a national tree. I felt Annabel Goldie's pain when she spoke about the process that she had to go through regarding the golden eagle, which sounded particularly traumatic. As others have said, we would not be the first country to consider such things. For

example, like Joan McAlpine, I understand that before the President of the United States signed a bill designating the oak as the USA's national tree in 2004 there was a national poll. Although I agree that the Scots pine seems to be the obvious choice for Scotland, I foresee an interesting debate if advocates of the Scots pine are forced to defend their choice against proponents who argue that the autumn beauty of the rowan and the graceful splendour of the birch merit a mention. Who knows? Perhaps we could have not just one national tree for Scotland, but the big three.

We shall consider all those matters in the light of the Public Petitions Committee's consideration of the petition, which we expect to receive shortly.

However, I fear that I need to inject a less welcome note into the discussion—Alison Johnstone has already touched on the matter to a degree. Regretfully, we must accept the fact that ash dieback is present in the UK and is likely to spread further. Unfortunately, that is just one of a number of tree health problems—which Alison Johnstone correctly identified—that we are facing. Dothistroma needle blight is affecting pine trees, including Scots pine, especially in the north and east of the country, and we have *Phytophthora ramorum* on larch, mainly in Galloway and Argyllshire. The mortality rate from Dothistroma among Scots pine is alarmingly high and presents a real concern for us. In fact, the rate is higher than for Corsican pine and lodgepole pine. Action plans for those three diseases have been developed by the Scottish tree health advisory group and are now being implemented.

Earlier this week, the independent expert United Kingdom task force on tree health and plant biosecurity, which includes three academics from Scottish universities, published its report on how best to address the tree and plant disease threats that we face. I am now discussing its recommendations with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Owen Paterson, and it is likely that we will meet shortly to discuss the matter further.

There is an important link between tackling tree health and the aspirations behind the idea of designating a national tree of Scotland. That is because awareness raising is an important element in the range of tree health-related measures that we need to take. The process of designating a national tree could help in making people more aware of the threats and what they can do to prevent the diseases from spreading—for example, washing their boots after visiting woodlands for a walk.

I will respond to a number of points that were raised in the debate.

I agree with Joan McAlpine that our woodlands are key places in which to work and play and for children to understand the natural environment around them. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is keen to explore further how we develop forest schools, and I want to take that forward.

Patricia Ferguson and Annabel Goldie strongly recommended a wide consultation on selecting a national tree. I take that point on board.

Rod Campbell mentioned that new symbols can bolster identity. Jean Urquhart, I think, made the similar point that symbols can unite people rather than divide them. That is an important part of having a national tree, a national bird or any other national symbol that we might care to mention.

Mike MacKenzie made moving reference to the use of Scots pine in the construction trade. The Forestry Commission has the objective of improving the percentage of building materials that are formed by timber to lock in carbon in building design.

The key point is what we do to take the process forward. I am waiting for the submission from the Public Petitions Committee. We are very sympathetic to the concept of having a national tree, but I want to see what recommendations the committee, based on the consultation that it has done, can give us in relation to a process for going forward.

On timescales, I am optimistic. I hope that, should we decide to designate a national tree, we are talking about a much shorter timescale than having to wait for the referendum and, indeed, for Scotland to become independent in March 2016.

I welcome the debate. I am excited about the idea of identifying a national tree for Scotland and, in light of today's discussions and the committee's deliberations, I will think hard about how best to take the matter forward in a way that ensures that we reap the potential benefits without incurring disproportionate costs associated with the designation process.

I thank members for their speeches.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

Correction

Iain Gray has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):

At col 20116, paragraph 4—

Original text—

Is Ms Constance saying that the Scottish National Party's position is that, given control over employment law, it would ban zero-hours contracts, as the Labour Party leader Mr Miliband has committed to do?

Corrected text—

Is Ms Constance saying that the Scottish National Party's position is that, given control over employment law, it would ban zero-hours contracts, as the UK shadow health secretary, Andy Burnham, has committed to do?

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