



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 3 September 2013

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 3 September 2013

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):

Welcome back. It is good to be back with you once more.

The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader this afternoon is Matt Oliver, the chief executive of More Than Gold 2014.

Mr Matt Oliver (More Than Gold 2014): In a little under a year, 71 nations and territories that make up the Commonwealth will descend on Scotland for the 20th Commonwealth games.

The Christian church in Scotland, united under the banner of More Than Gold, will seek to serve the games in a variety of ways. Building on the success of 2012, hundreds of churches will be opening their doors to show the games live on big screens to their communities and provide refreshments. One thousand people from around the world will assist the church in its activities, bringing with them cultural engagement programmes of dance, music and drama. The Salvation Army will distribute 250,000 bottles of cold water to spectators and, in partnership with the Scottish Government, we will provide free accommodation to over 400 members of athletes' families and to official volunteers.

Many of the nations that are competing next year will be able to trace the Christian roots of their countries directly to the great missionaries of the past, many of whom came from this great nation. People such as David Livingstone, Mary Slessor and James Chalmers all contributed to the spread of Christianity throughout the world. However, for an old sportsman such as me, it is Eric Liddell, the Olympic athlete who famously refused to run in the 100m heats as they were due to be run on a Sunday, who epitomises the common values of sport and the gospel. In the film "Chariots of Fire", Eric famously says:

"God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure".

Liddell would be given a sporting lifeline when given a place in the 400m, in which he would go on to become an Olympic champion. For Liddell, serving and honouring God was truly worth more than gold.

It is the prayer of the team at More Than Gold 2014 that, as Glasgow prepares to host the

world's third-largest sporting event, it will feel God's pleasure; that, as the church in Scotland rises in unison in acts of service, hospitality and outreach, it will feel God's pleasure; and that you, as you go about your business in this place today, will feel God's pleasure.

Business Motion

14:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-07570, 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 3 September 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Motion of Condolence

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister's Statement on the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2013-14

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2013-14

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.45 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 September 2013

2.00 pm Member's Oath/Affirmation

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Portfolio Questions
Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

followed by Ministerial Statement: Helicopter Incident

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2013-14 (continuation of debate)

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 September 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 Equal Opportunities Committee Debate:
Where Gypsy/Travellers Live

followed by

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate:
Report on 6th Report 2013, Draft Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland

followed by

Legislative Consent Motion: High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill – UK Legislation

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

Tuesday 10 September 2013

2.00 pm

Time for Reflection

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by

Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Historic Environment – The Way Forward

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Wednesday 11 September 2013

2.00 pm

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm

Portfolio Questions
Rural Affairs and the Environment
Justice and the Law Officers

followed by

Ministerial Statement: Draft Budget 2014-15

followed by

Scottish Government Debate: Enterprise Networks

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Thursday 12 September 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

Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Independence Referendum Bill

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

Tuesday 17 September 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 18 September 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Health and Wellbeing
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 19 September 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 Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Motion of Condolence

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is one that we would prefer not to be holding: a motion of condolence in the name of Ruth Davidson, following the death of David McLetchie MSP. I remind members that a book of condolence will be available for them to sign in the black and white corridor for the rest of the week.

I would like to welcome Sheila and James and all of the McLetchie family to the gallery as Parliament pays its own tributes to David McLetchie. Thank you for being with us today. On behalf of all of us who were at the funeral, I say to James that the eulogy he gave was the finest eulogy from a son to a father that I have ever heard.

David and I started together as part of the first intake of MSPs in 1999. In those early days, I would come into the chamber when I knew that David was due to speak. He was always witty, clever and a great debater, and I wished that I could be like him.

I had a great personal relationship with David. We were often on opposite sides of an issue, and we both served on the first Scotland Bill Committee. It is fair to say that that committee was more than occasionally fraught and regularly robust, and David and I were often at the heart of that. However, through that long process, we used to pass notes to each other commenting on the day's business, and we always maintained good humour and total respect for each other's point of view.

Despite failing health, David played a full part in parliamentary business way beyond the time that some of us thought he should. Those contributions were as robust and erudite as any of his previous contributions over the years. That was the mark of the man, and it demonstrates his commitment to the Parliament.

David always shone brightly in the chamber in particular, which I know he loved. We will all miss his contributions. This place will be that bit dimmer without David McLetchie.

14:06

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): The best of parliamentarians and the best of men—the death of David McLetchie leaves a hole that we will struggle to fill. I knew David for only a few short years; others in the chamber—those from the class of 99—knew him far better and far longer than I did. Among my colleagues on the

Conservative benches, there were friendships with him that lasted half a lifetime.

As we remember David's political achievement and remark on the size of his contribution to the life of the chamber and the democracy of our country, we must remember that politics was not his first love; it was not even a close second. David's priority first, last and always was his family. Our condolences go out to his wife, Sheila, his son, James, his mother, Rena, and their wider family, many of whom we welcome to the chamber gallery today.

David was a man who was shaped and forged by his family, background and city. He was an Edinburgh boy who was brought up near Meadowbank. He started out at Leith academy primary school before he won a bursary for George Heriot's. There he attended the literary and debating society, although it was a portent of things to come that he claimed that his membership was only an excuse to sneak out to the nearby Captains Bar for a pint after.

David then did law at the University of Edinburgh—he was the first of his family to receive a higher education. In 1975, he was selected as the Conservative candidate in Edinburgh Central. A general election was anticipated in the following year, but that election would not come for another four years, of course. That gave David the opportunity to work with his Labour opponent—the MP Robin Cook—on the no campaign of 1979. David never tired of highlighting the irony of that in later years.

David completed his legal training at Shepherd and Wedderburn and joined Tods Murray in 1980, where he became a partner and established himself as a highly regarded expert in the field of tax planning, trusts and estates. David brought to the Parliament when it was established in 1999 that legal training, intellectual rigour, attention to detail and discipline. My colleague Mary Scanlon speaks for all of us when she says that she always felt like a 10-year-old taking her jotters to the headmaster and waiting to see whether a red pen would be scored across the page. Indeed, I fear that there is a great irony and—dare I say—an impropriety in Parliament's tribute today. I can almost feel the spirit of David, who was always quick to castigate those who worship the false god of consensus, clamouring for an amendment to the motion, if only to correct a grammatical error.

Since David's death, much has been made of his contribution to the party and Parliament as Conservative leader; the strength that he showed in 1997 after our electoral wipe-out in stooping to build up our party with worn-out tools; the resilience to keep speaking his truth clearly, knowing that there was a space and a need for a right-of-centre voice in public debate; the reward

of outperforming pundits' predictions in 1999 and establishing a sizeable Conservative group in the Parliament; and the personal pride that he rightly took four years later in winning his own Edinburgh Pentlands constituency under first past the post.

Despite the other leaders having parliamentary experience that far exceeded his, David was a debater of the first order who would often come out on top. A personal highlight for me as a young journalist who followed the fledgling Parliament was his contribution on the appointment of Des McNulty as a junior minister in 2002. During his speech, David managed to remind members that there were but 123 reshuffling days left until dissolution; console the mere seven Labour members who had not yet been given a job in government; comment on the illegitimacy of John Reid, as remarked on in a taped conversation between Henry McLeish and Helen Liddell; score several substantive points on the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill; and crack a fine joke about Jim and Dr Richard's Wallace-Simpson partnership leading to an abdication. He did all that in less than two minutes; it was a tour de force.

David's contribution did not stop when he resigned the leadership. Indeed, his period as chief whip and business manager during the previous parliamentary session tested his political gifts. His robust but honest approach gathered him many plaudits. David played with a straight bat; he always did what he said he would do.

It was in no small part David's skill, judgment, ability to work with others and determination that this Parliament and this legislative process should proceed that ensured that the fragility of a minority Government did not result in political paralysis. During that period, his long-standing personal assistant, Ann, would often hear him speaking on the telephone to other business managers, eloquently and logically outlining the Conservative Party position and, consequently, how he would vote. In the very next breath he would continue, "And may I say that your voting position on this is totally at odds with your policy," and a lecture on inconsistency would follow.

David was not above trying to whip the other parties either. Once he was sure that his group was accounted for, he would ask the other business managers whether all their MSPs were present and correct. Given David's propensity for checking every detail, he often questioned the assurances that he was given. He would ask, "What about so-and-so? I thought that they were away for the day." On more than one occasion, he dispatched his parliamentary researcher, Martin, behind enemy lines to chat with friends on other corridors just to make sure. In many respects, David was the first-ever cross-party chief whip.

David's contribution to Parliament was not just in the chamber or the committee rooms, as significant as those contributions were. He was clubbable, personable, generous with his time, anecdotes and stories, and generous with a drink at the bar and a friendly conversation with someone whom he may well have just eviscerated in the chamber. He added to the life of the Parliament, not just its business.

David was no machine politician; he also had a life and interests outside of this place, including his family, golf and his beloved Heart of Midlothian. A regular Tynecastle attender, he would gently tease opponents such as the First Minister and John Swinney for being so-called plastic Jambos by asking when was the last time they had made it to a game. At David's death, the Hearts message boards were filled with tributes. My favourite said:

"he came across as a great Jambo and a real gentleman."

The message was right on both counts.

I was thinking of the best words in which to describe David: intelligent, forensic, principled, generous, humorous, loyal, pedantic, irascible, curmudgeonly and combative. However, he had a charm and warmth that drew people to him and took people with him. I settle on brave as the word best to describe him. David was brave to pick up the reins of the defeated party; he was brave to stand his ground, speak his truth and defy consensus; he was brave to bear the death of his wife and to give strength to his then teenage son; he was brave to love again; and he was brave in the face of his illness.

I know that David would not want today to pass without due recognition given to the Presiding Officer and the parliamentary staff whose support allowed him to attend this place until so recently, and long past the time that many would have been able to do so. That attendance and service took a bravery and strength, too. I thank you for allowing that to happen.

I thank also the many members of this Parliament, past and present, who have contacted me and my Conservative colleagues to give their sympathies and share their memories of David. He had friends on all sides of the chamber, and it is a mark of his decency and generosity that some of the warmest tributes have come from his fiercest political opponents.

In David's death, the Conservatives have lost a leader and MSPs have lost a colleague. We have all lost a friend. David McLetchie was the best of parliamentarians and the best of men, and this Parliament and country is the poorer for his passing.

It is with great sadness but with great pride that I move,

That the Parliament expresses its deep regret and sadness at the death of David McLetchie CBE MSP; offers its sympathy and condolences to David's family and friends; recognises the high regard in which he was held by so many colleagues; appreciates his significant contribution to civic life through his legal career, and acknowledges his distinguished record of service, both in this Parliament and to his constituents in the Lothians. [*Applause.*]

14:14

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): On behalf of the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Government, let me join in supporting the motion from Ruth Davidson paying fond tribute to David McLetchie and, of course, expressing our condolences to his family who are here with us today—his first love, as Ruth Davidson put it.

David was a founding member of the Parliament. He was a respected, intelligent and witty advocate for his party. His political achievements were considerable. He led the Conservatives from a wipe-out in 1997 to a secure footing in this Parliament and, I think by general acknowledgement, allowed the Conservative Party to punch well above its numerical weight in this Parliament.

I rather liked David's description of his decision to become a parliamentary leader under such unpromising circumstances. He said:

"it was a combination of a mid-life career change and a mid-life crisis."

Whatever it was, he served this Parliament and his constituents as a man of character, experience and persistence.

As we have heard, David was a gifted debater, and in seven years as a party leader he proved himself to be a worthy opponent for First Ministers and leading figures across the chamber. Whatever the issue—and he pursued many, from the Holyrood building project to education reforms to housing—David would draw on his legal skills to produce an effective cross-examination, which always climaxed in a devastating political punchline.

Like Ruth Davidson, I was drawn to the parliamentary masterpieces that were his speeches on what are fairly mundane matters and were fairly regular matters in those days: governmental changes. David managed to turn them into parliamentary classics. A speech in a debate in 2002 illustrates that very well. This is how David opened it:

"Here we are again with another ministerial reshuffle. Sometimes, it seems that there are more drop-outs in the Scottish Executive than there were at Woodstock."

I am not sure whether David was personally at Woodstock; nonetheless, the point was well made. In the same speech, he went on to deliver the absolute classic. He acknowledged that 3 per cent of Scots believed that he was the Deputy First Minister. This is how he responded to that. He said:

“That is a worrying statistic. It means that, as we speak, 150,000 people are walking around Scotland blaming me for Jim Wallace’s mistakes. I would like to take this opportunity to state categorically for the *Official Report* that I take absolutely no responsibility for such failures.”—[*Official Report*, 8 May 2002; c 8622, 23.]

That was classic McLetchie.

He was never shy in holding the Government or his opponents to account; equally, he rarely lost the respect or friendship of any. It was a measure of the man that he never allowed a political disagreement to become just a personal disagreement.

When Donald Dewar died in October 2000, David McLetchie paid tribute to him with characteristic eloquence. He made the point that

“One does not have to be of the same political persuasion as another to recognise in them someone who has ability, sincerity and conviction.”—[*Official Report*, 13 October 2000; c 1081.]

The same words stand also for David himself. He was equally committed to serving his constituents and his country. It is a goal that we all share, even if we differ on what the means should be.

David and I shared two great loves—not just Heart of Midlothian Football Club but golf—but I would say that it was not until he served as Tory business manager during the period of minority government that I got to know him best. There, I think, his talents truly excelled. He always negotiated hard, in his party’s interest but also in the interests of the Parliament and effective government, and his word was absolutely his bond.

In my estimation, that performance marks David as an outstanding politician of the devolution era. There is no question but that, when the history of this Parliament comes to be written, David McLetchie’s place will be assured. He had many, many qualities. He fought hard and passionately in everything that he did—in politics and, personally, in his final battle with cancer. This Parliament is poorer—much poorer—without David McLetchie. [*Applause.*]

14:14

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): This is another sad day for the Scottish Parliament as we gather to reflect on the loss of David McLetchie, whose untimely death we deeply regret. On behalf of the Scottish Labour Party, I

not only offer our sincerest condolences to his family and friends, who must feel his loss most fiercely, but recognise that David was a man who had a huge impact on people across this chamber and far beyond.

As has been said, David was another of the 1999 group of MSPs who were given the task of lifting the Scottish Parliament from the dry words of a parliamentary act to a living, breathing part of Scotland’s political, economic and social landscape, and he was a key player in helping the Scottish Parliament become that place.

Again, as has been said, David was a great parliamentarian, fierce in debate and unrelenting in deconstructing arguments that might have displayed any hint of inconsistency. He was logical and rational, with a devastating turn of phrase. I still remember to this day the feeling of stress when, serving as a minister, I would see him rise to his feet in that languid way of his to deliver what we all feared would be the killer question. Although his wit and withering scorn were his greatest weapons, I believe that he deployed them not to belittle but to make his case. Yes, he was tough in debate, but it was always the argument, not the person, he was pursuing.

Of course, David McLetchie was far more than simply a debater. In committee, his passion to make the Parliament work, interrogate legislation and develop policy was at its most evident. Always willing to do the heavy lifting, he took his job seriously, regardless of whether that work would be recognised or heralded by others. I believe that he simply wanted to make a difference.

David McLetchie always made you think. It was rather unsettling for a Tory to do this, but I often found him challenging me to test my own assumptions rather than to presume them to be a self-evident truth. It is a useful lesson for us all, I think. I recall his capturing in a wonderful phrase the weakness of some of us in Scotland’s political environment when he said that we may now be living in a Scotland where that which is not banned will be compulsory.

David was a man of intellect and wit with interests far beyond politics, and his life and legacy are hard to describe fully. What do I think when I think of David? At heart, when I think of David, I smile. For all our political differences, his humanity, compassion and interest in people were far stronger. He valued people, listened and revealed a warmth and friendship that could never be limited by party boundaries. Across this chamber, we shall miss his wisdom, his commitment and his love for life.

In conclusion, I want to echo the words of the Presiding Officer. If there were ever a testimony to the person David McLetchie was beyond this

place, the man who was not simply a politician, it was to be found in the words of his son James who, at his funeral, bravely and compellingly described what David meant to his family through tough and happy times. It is testament to the way that this man—this husband, father and son—lived his life that those who knew him best could speak so powerfully of his goodness and love for them.

We shall miss David and our thoughts today are for this good man taken too soon and for those for whom this loss is so much greater still. [*Applause.*]

14:23

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Every morning on my way to my son's school, I would meet J T Murphy out for his morning stroll. As an old Fife coal miner from deep working class roots in Lochore, J T was not someone one would imagine to be a natural Conservative supporter. However, he was a David McLetchie supporter. J T liked his straight talking and forensic style and, every single day, he would tell me how good David was. Such was David's widespread appeal.

I, too, liked David. I only really got to know him as a fellow member of the Scotland Bill Committee. James Kelly, Richard Baker and I would work closely with David, tapping into his knowledge and understanding of the territory. Often, we would subconsciously—and physically—look to David at committee meetings when faced with an unexpectedly tricky issue, and I am sure that our collective sighs of relief were audible when he came up with an inspired response to a difficult question. Occasionally, however, he would say nothing, with a wicked glint in his eye. We would scrabble around and, panicking, attempt to conjure up some kind of answer that would pale into significance beside David's own answer. Such was David's sense of humour.

Earlier this year, we paid tribute to another pillar of this Parliament, Brian Adam, who was credited with helping to make minority government work for the first time in Holyrood when all had expected it to fail. David McLetchie deserves equal praise for his role in ensuring that it worked. As the business manager for the Conservatives, he was able to reach out and build relationships with others that ensured that the business could get done. That feat was even more remarkable because he had previously been in regular combat with the SNP as the leader of the Scottish Conservatives. Such were David's versatility and intelligence.

David was a towering figure who changed the future for the Scottish Conservatives and Scottish politics. Such were David's widespread appeal, his versatility and his intelligence. Such were David's

many talents that he helped to change Scotland. What will we do without David McLetchie?

J T Murphy passed away a couple of years ago. David never had the opportunity to meet J T down here, but I like to think that he will get to meet him up there and that they will have a drink and a laugh together.

14:26

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I first met the man when I was just a young cub reporter and I was doing an interview with him—I do not have the faintest idea what it was about, but I remember thinking, "There's a good guy. Too bad there are strikes against him: he's a Tory and he's a Jambo." [*Laughter.*]

I later had reason to change my mind about him. Just before we came here, we were both at a yee-haw concert by Reba McEntire—he was as big a country fan as me. We started to talk about that and found that we had a great deal in common at that level.

Although David was a wonderful debater—none better has graced this Parliament—he never let me in, and I had a slight grin about that. However, I am very grateful for something that he once told me. I do not know whether members will remember, but we had an unseemly row—I think that it was in the first Parliament—about whether we were worthy of our wages. Scottish Television had conducted an opinion poll and found that the Scots thought that we were not. Well, quelle surprise! I advised the Parliament to ignore all of that because rules had been laid down that we should stick to, or else we would not be able to ensure that other people would stick to the rules that we laid down. David came up to me after the debate and said, "I think you did the Parliament a good turn today." The fact that he knew and recognised that and told me about it was worth a great deal to me. I will miss him and so will we all.

14:27

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the Presiding Officer, the party leaders and Margo MacDonald for all the kind and touching remarks that they have made this afternoon, spoken with affection and grace. I know that David McLetchie's family will have been much comforted by all that has been said.

My first recollection of David McLetchie, at a party meeting many years ago, is hardly an extensive encapsulation of either his character or his talents: I noted him simply as that good-looking big Edinburgh lawyer chap with the glasses. Mind you, coming from a then Glasgow lawyer, that was in the realms of high praise. [*Laughter.*]

Even then, David made an immediate impression, leavening the universally dry fodder that was so characteristic of the business meetings of all parties. Not only was he analytical and forensic in his approach to all issues, he was dogged in his pursuit of what he believed to be right. Those attributes, in conjunction with an approach to political issues derived from basic principle and an unshakeable commitment to his political beliefs, made him the effective and formidable political operator that he was.

In politics, working relationships between colleagues in the same party are routine and we could not function without them. However, real friendships within parties are perhaps a little less common, and across parties they are rarer still. Yet, in politics, David McLetchie cultivated and established all those different relationships. That is not easy to do, but, as we have heard from the speeches this afternoon, even among his political opponents he elicited respect and affection.

When David became leader of the Scottish Conservatives, those personal strengths of character served his party and his colleagues well. His first ever speech to the Parliament in 1999 had clarity, vision and his trademark acerbity. He began by saying:

"I am well aware that, unless there is a sudden, widespread and highly unlikely outbreak of common sense, my candidacy for First Minister will not succeed this afternoon."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1999; c 19.]

He then articulated his vision for the Scottish Conservatives: he said that we should be a constructive Opposition in the Parliament, dedicated to making it a success, and that we should aspire to Government in Scotland again some day. That is still the vision for my party—it was endorsed by me and Ruth Davidson as his successors. David was unflagging in his endeavours to realise those ambitions.

When I succeeded David, I could not have asked for a more supportive colleague. His counsel was sound and any confidence that I shared with him remained with him; he knew how solitary leadership can be. His friendship was comforting and reassuring, and his integrity manifest.

The one word that I knew never to mention in David's presence was "consensus". To him, "consensus" was synonymous with fudge, dilution of intellectual rigour and impairment of political purity. However, he was pragmatic. As others have said, in 2007, when the Parliament first experienced minority government, there was a need for party business managers with honed political skills, razor-sharp minds and acutely sensitive political antenna who were astute in judgment and skilled in negotiation. I could not have been better served than I was by David

McLetchie. He excelled, and not only his party, but the Parliament, were the beneficiaries.

The touching and eloquent tributes that we have heard this afternoon reflect David McLetchie's enormous contribution to Scottish politics and our sorrow as politicians at the loss of a colleague, a gentleman and a friend. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: I will allow a short period of suspension before we move to the rest of this afternoon's business. I suspend the meeting until 2.50.

14:32

Meeting suspended.

14:50

On resuming—

Topical Question Time

Helicopter Safety

1. Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the offshore industry regarding the impact on the oil and gas industry in Scotland of the recent Super Puma tragedy.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): First of all, I express on behalf of the Scottish Government, and I know all of Parliament, our condolences to the families of the four people who lost their lives when the Super Puma helicopter crash took place on 23 August. I also express our sympathy to the other individuals who were on board the flight for the ordeal that they endured.

Since the crash, the Scottish Government has worked closely with the United Kingdom Government, the offshore industry and other key stakeholders in managing the consequences of the incident in relation to the impact on the oil and gas industry in Scotland. Officials have been fully engaged in the helicopter safety steering group meetings that were held on Saturday, Wednesday and Thursday following the incident. Officials have also participated in the oil and gas leaders meetings at which all operators in the North Sea were present.

I have spoken to Malcolm Webb, the chief executive of Oil & Gas UK, which is the representative body for the UK offshore oil and gas industry, and I have also had discussions in relation to the incident with Jake Molloy of the RMT and both John Taylor and Pat Rafferty of Unite. On Friday, I visited the police gold command in Aberdeen to speak with the emergency services, who deserve our grateful thanks and acknowledgement for the excellent rescue operation that resulted in the saving of 14 lives.

Subject to the Parliament's agreement, I will make a full statement on the issue tomorrow.

Mark McDonald: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer and I echo his expressions of condolence. Those of us who have family, friends and constituents who work in the offshore sector will know how difficult this period has been for many individuals across Scotland. Will the cabinet secretary advise in what ways the Scottish Government is able and stands ready to support an industry review of helicopter safety?

John Swinney: I confirm to the Parliament that the Government will co-operate in all the ways we can with the industry in relation to the review of safety and the encouragement of safe utilisation of modes of transport in transporting individuals to the North Sea oil and gas sector. As I said in my initial response, Government officials participated in helicopter safety steering group meetings held during the past week. Those proceedings were, in my opinion, a model of how dialogue should be conducted in partnership between employers and the trade unions that are involved, with a willingness to consider and address the serious issues and concerns that are relevant to members of oil and gas staff who are concerned about the circumstances that they face. The Government will certainly actively work to facilitate and encourage that review of safety.

Mark McDonald: The cabinet secretary will also be aware that, as we have discussed, there are concerns among not just workers but their families around the continuing safety of helicopter flights to offshore installations. Can he confirm that his view is that there needs to be a careful dialogue between operators, the unions, the workforce and the wider oil and gas family—family members and so on—in order to restore some of the confidence that has been damaged by the recent incident and other incidents over the past five years?

John Swinney: That dialogue is crucial. It is vital that the industry engages in dialogue, as took place at the helicopter safety steering group, between employers and trade unions as representatives of the workforce. In observing closely the proceedings of the helicopter safety steering group over the period, I saw the way in which information and advice were marshalled for the employer and trade union representatives, which enabled a considered judgment to be arrived at to enable the temporary suspension of the utilisation of some of the Super Puma fleet to be overcome. That was achieved because of evidence-based discussion involving all parties, and it represents how we can try to address the legitimate anxiety of members of the public about ensuring that, in all circumstances, individuals are able to be transported to the oil and gas sector safely and reliably. That must be an objective for us all.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will know the difference that was made to offshore health and safety on rigs and platforms in the North Sea by the Cullen inquiry, which was established following the Piper Alpha disaster.

Given the high number of serious helicopter incidents in the UK sector of the North Sea compared with other parts of the same province, will the cabinet secretary support calls for a public

inquiry into helicopter transport in the UK sector—one that would go beyond an internal industry review and would follow the model that was set by Cullen—in order to give the workforce the same confidence in helicopter transport in the North Sea as they have in safety on rigs and platforms following Cullen?

John Swinney: I am obviously familiar with the issues that have been raised in connection with helicopter safety. I think that the most effective thing that we can do is wait until we have the full outcome of the inquiry into this particular circumstance before we decide whether there is merit in taking forward that wider inquiry. I say that because, if we look at the experience of helicopter safety, we can see that over the past couple of years there has been a rising tide of confidence in helicopter safety in the North Sea. A point of very great regret about the incident that took place on 23 August is that that confidence has clearly been undermined.

I think that before we form a judgment as to whether a full inquiry is required, we should allow the investigation of this incident to take its course and hear the outcome of the work that has been undertaken by the air accident investigation branch, which lies at the heart of the investigative role. The points raised by Mr Macdonald can quite properly be considered in that context.

Food Banks

2. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support food banks.

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): I congratulate Jackie Baillie on her new role shadowing the welfare portfolio. Like my health colleagues in the past, I look forward to some lively spats.

The Scottish Government supports access to affordable, healthy and sustainable food for all and acknowledges that, with the current economic climate, welfare reform and increasing food prices, that access is becoming a greater concern for many people.

The Scottish Government has provided an additional £9.2 million to the Scottish welfare fund, which means that we are providing the capacity to award an additional 5,600 community care grants and more than 100,000 crisis grants in this financial year. That fund will provide people with emergency support, so the necessity for food banks should be reduced. However, my concern is that the United Kingdom Government benefits reform programme unfairly impacts on some of the most vulnerable members of our society. In particular, I am concerned that the cuts and changes to the welfare system will undermine the

long-term approach that we are taking to tackle the causes of poverty.

The solution is for the Scottish Parliament to have control over welfare matters so that we can devise policies for the benefit of the Scottish people.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the minister for welcoming me to my new portfolio. I hope that, in a few weeks' time, she does not regret doing so.

I am most interested in the powers that the Scottish Government already has—powers that it should be exercising to protect the most vulnerable. Frankly, I am appalled that, in 21st century Scotland, we have food banks in our communities.

According to the Trussell Trust, the number of Scots accessing emergency food banks over the past year has increased by 150 per cent, to more than 14,000 people. Almost one third of those people were children, which should concern us all.

What more can the Scottish Government do specifically to help children who are experiencing such extremes of poverty that they have to depend on food banks?

Margaret Burgess: The Scottish Government has taken forward a number of actions to reduce child poverty in Scotland—an issue that is of great concern for me and for the Scottish Government. As I said, we have put in place a number of activities to provide support, including the Scottish welfare fund, our social wage—the social wage helps families that are struggling—and free prescriptions. We are against the UK Government's welfare cuts, as Jackie Baillie well knows.

As I laid out, if we had our own welfare system and were in charge of our own economy, we could ensure that our policies in health, housing and welfare were integrated to ensure that we could deliver the best possible opportunity for all the people of Scotland, and particularly our children.

Jackie Baillie: There is no disagreement on this side of the chamber about the impact of the UK Government's welfare cuts, but despite the actions that she has outlined we still see children queuing for assistance at food banks.

The minister will be aware that, since the Scottish welfare fund was introduced to provide crisis grants, there has been a significant underspend in that budget. That goes against everything that we know about the level of need that exists in our communities—there is even anecdotal evidence that, having been refused crisis loans, people are being referred to food banks. What action will the Scottish Government take to ensure that, instead of there being an

underspend in that budget, the people who need them most can access crisis grants?

Margaret Burgess: Rather than criticise the Scottish Government on the Scottish welfare fund, Jackie Baillie should congratulate us on establishing that fund and topping it up by £9.2 million. The Scottish welfare fund, which came in in April this year, is a new fund that has not bedded in yet, but we are doing everything that we can to encourage people to use it. I spent the summer recess travelling up and down Scotland speaking to local authorities, third sector organisations and community groups to promote the fund and to encourage take-up. An officer within the Scottish Government is monitoring the fund for consistency and to look at how we can do things better. Jackie Baillie should join us in promoting the fund and, rather than criticise us, congratulate us on introducing a fund that protects our poorest people.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Yesterday, I had a meeting with the food bank in Inverclyde, where I was informed that, since opening up last September, it has fed 2,500 people, including 750 children. Those figures are worsening, despite the fact that we have not yet felt the full effects of welfare reform. Can the minister inform me what discussions are taking place with the UK Government to inform it that its wider economic agenda is not working and that there are many people and families whose lives are being devastated as a consequence?

Margaret Burgess: There is regular correspondence with the UK Government on those issues. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in March, ahead of the UK Government's budget statement, to set out the Scottish Government's concerns about the failure of the UK Government to grow the economy. I share the finance secretary's concern about the cuts to benefit incomes for families across the country at a time when many are having to deal with sharp rises in the cost of living. I will continue to raise those issues with UK Government ministers at every opportunity, both in person and in writing.

As I said, the solution is for Scotland to have control of its own economy and welfare system. We might then see a reduction in food banks in this country.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Does the minister agree that it is unacceptable that unaffordable water charges are acting as a barrier to the setting up of a food bank in Coatbridge? Is charitable exemption under the Government's scheme an option to allow that desperately needed facility to open?

Margaret Burgess: As set out in the current statement on charging for water for 2010 to 2015, the exemption is available only to those organisations that received an exemption in 1999, so it is not currently available to new organisations. However, Scottish Water recognises the issues that that creates and is working with the Scottish Government to look at introducing a revised scheme from 2015 that would be open to all small charities. Therefore, I accept the point that Elaine Smith has made.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I apologise to Margo MacDonald, who wanted to ask a supplementary question, but we need to move on to the next item of business.

Programme for Government 2013-14

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Alex Salmond on the Scottish Government's programme for government for 2013-14. The First Minister's statement will be followed by a debate, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:04

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): It is better for all of us if decisions about Scotland's future are taken by those who care most about Scotland—that is, the people who choose to live and work in our country. That is the simple but, I think, compelling truth at the heart of the case for independence, and the best evidence of it lies in the record of this Parliament.

It is now 16 years since the people of this country, in a referendum, had the confidence and belief to bring this Parliament into existence. In doing so, we as a country and as a people made a choice between two futures and between those who argued that Westminster should decide for Scotland how our schools, universities and hospitals should be run, and those who maintained that we would all benefit if decisions about Scotland were taken here in Scotland.

We now know, beyond peradventure, that taking decisions in Scotland works for individuals, families and communities. The Parliament has demonstrated our concern for the most vulnerable in society. Free personal care for the elderly directly helps more than 77,000 people across Scotland and our legislation on homelessness is seen as an example round the world. We have started to tackle Scotland's shameful health inequalities through the ban on smoking in public places and legislation on minimum pricing for alcohol. We have helped hard-pressed families by freezing the council tax, by ending charges for prescriptions and eye and dental checks and by ending bridge tolls.

We have revived and protected the ancient and proud Scottish commitment to education by reintroducing free university and college tuition. As confirmed this very day in the first Police Scotland statistics, we have recognised communities' concerns about crime by adding more than 1,000 additional officers and thus we have seen crime fall to its lowest level for 39 years.

All those measures, and many more, demonstrate that this Parliament is delivering for communities across the country. Conversely, we also know—also beyond peradventure—that there

is a heavy cost when we leave decisions in the hands of Westminster. We get Governments that we did not vote for; we get the bedroom tax; we get cuts to capital spending in the teeth of a recession; we get attacks on the poor and on people with disabilities; and we get weapons of mass destruction on the River Clyde.

A poll published yesterday, which is confirmed by the social attitudes survey, asked people whether they trust the Scottish Parliament or the United Kingdom Parliament to take decisions for Scotland and found that 60 per cent of people in Scotland trust Holyrood compared to just 16 per cent who trust Westminster. The contrast and the choice that face the people next year could not be clearer.

This year's legislative programme, with 13 bills in total, will continue that strong track record not just of the Government but of the Parliament. Of course, not everything that matters can be addressed through legislation, but legislation does matter. All 13 of the bills in this year's programme will make a genuine difference to people in Scotland. They demonstrate effective governance.

One of the opportunities that is provided by devolution is to reform Scotland's public bodies and public services to make them more efficient and better at their true role, which is serving the public. When we took office, there were 199 public bodies in Scotland; now, there are 113, which is a reduction of more than 40 per cent. The public sector landscape is less cluttered but more focused and therefore more effective. This year, we will introduce legislation to merge Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, which will enable those bodies to operate more efficiently and will enhance our ability to preserve and protect our heritage.

The focus of public authorities can be really important, especially if a vacuum is developing at UK level. In 2010, the UK Government controversially deprived the Food Standards Agency of its responsibilities for nutrition and labelling. That move was subsequently seen by Westminster's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee as contributing to the UK's poor handling of the horsemeat scandal. Therefore, the food standards (Scotland) bill will establish a new body to take over all of the FSA's old functions. The new body will ensure that the industry and public in Scotland can have full confidence in the safety and provenance of our food.

Several other bills this year draw on expert reviews and will ensure that our laws are up to date and that our public services are responsive and efficient.

The mental health and adults with incapacity bill will implement recommendations made by the McManus review group and others. It will improve the efficiency of mental health legislation. Importantly, for the first time, victims of mentally disordered offenders will be notified if the person who has committed a crime against them is being released from custody. Therefore, they will be able to make representations to the Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland.

The damages bill will reform key aspects of the law relating to damages for personal injury, enacting recommendations made by the Scottish Law Commission. The conclusion of contracts bill will make it easier for contracts to be agreed electronically, helping to ensure that Scotland is an attractive place to do business. The bankruptcy consolidation bill will make Scottish bankruptcy law more accessible.

The courts reform bill will enable civil cases to be resolved more quickly. It will implement the proposals from Lord Gill's Scottish civil courts review, including the establishment of a new sheriff appeal court and a specialist personal injury court. It will ensure that cases are dealt with at the right level, recognising the Court of Session's historic role as the apex of our civil courts and delivering faster, fairer justice right across the system. It represents the most radical set of changes to the civil courts for more than a century.

One other change to the justice system will be of interest to the Parliament. We have all now accepted the need to end the system of automatic early release that was brought in by the Conservative Government in 1993 and left in place by the Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition here at Holyrood. It does not command public confidence.

We are now in a position to end automatic early release for sexual offenders who are sentenced to more than four years and for serious violent offenders. That follows the work to stabilise the prison population and then reduce it over time by implementing other recommendations of the McLeish commission, such as introducing strong community-based sentences for less serious offenders. Further steps will follow as we continue the successful implementation of our justice reform programme.

The things that I mentioned—the action on food standards, the new rights for victims of mentally disordered offenders and the major improvements to the justice system—are the fruits of having our own Parliament. I can tell members from 23 years' experience of Westminster that that Parliament only rarely had the time or inclination to respond to specific Scottish challenges or priorities.

However, those bills—that pattern of legislation—are also part of a larger story. This Parliament listens to evidence and seeks consensus where possible. It has used its powers to create opportunities for people across the country. Through the programme for government that we publish today, it will, over the course of this year, empower communities, create a fairer Scotland, accelerate economic recovery and mitigate the impact of Westminster austerity.

One of the most important bills of the next period is the community empowerment and renewal bill. The bill will strengthen community planning, simplify the operation of the community right to buy and make it easier for communities to buy public sector land and buildings. One of this Parliament's great early achievements was the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which was introduced by a coalition Government with support from across the chamber. The Government has given new momentum to the right-to-buy provisions of that legislation. We launched the Scottish land fund, established the land reform review group and, earlier in the summer, announced a new ambition that, by 2020, the amount of land owned by the communities of Scotland would double to an impressive total of 1 million acres.

In June, we approved an application to register a community interest in land at Cape Wrath, next to the famous lighthouse. There are, in fact, two famous lighthouses at the north and south tips of our west coast. The southern one, at Mull of Galloway, came into community ownership this year; the land at Cape Wrath is now on its way to community ownership. With due respect to the Ministry of Defence, I suspect that most people in Scotland would rather that the stunning walkways of Cape Wrath—including the northern end of the new Scottish national trail—were in community ownership and freely accessible to the people than that they were an extension to a bombing range.

This year's summer Cabinets saw additional steps to empower communities. In July, in Shetland, we established a working group to consider greater powers for the island councils. Two weeks ago, in Hawick, we facilitated the borderlands initiative, which sees Scottish Borders Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council working with northern English local authorities. Last week, in Campbeltown, we announced the establishment of a rural parliament to give greater weight to the needs and priorities of remote and rural communities.

This morning, in Dundee, I saw the importance of community empowerment in urban areas. St Mary's community centre was created by people in the local area. They created a board, raised the funding and drove the project through. I saw one

of the art workshops that the centre provides. Everyone I met was passionate about the benefits of the centre and the importance of the work that is done by the community to help itself.

When the Cabinet was in Campbeltown, I spoke about how independence offers an opportunity to renew democracy at all levels in Scotland. That is true at a national level—we can draft a written constitution affirming the most treasured values of our newly independent nation—but it also applies at a local level. Independence is not just about national institutions; it is about releasing the potential of our people and our local communities.

Our licensing bill is a further example of our commitment to stronger local powers. It improves and extends powers for local authorities in areas such as the regulation of metal dealers—a move that will help to tackle metal theft—and the licensing of taxis and private hire cars. The bill will introduce a new offence of supplying alcohol to people under the age of 18. It will also introduce a new licensing system for air weapons. Following the tragic death of Andrew Morton some years ago, there was wide support in this chamber for devolving the regulation of such weapons. Now, this Parliament can finally meet public concern over the issue and find a Scottish solution to a Scottish priority.

This Government recognises that strong public services are a bedrock on which communities and individuals rely. They are an essential part of our vision for a fairer Scotland. Since the start of the Scottish patient safety programme in 2008, standardised mortality in hospitals has fallen by almost 12 per cent. Don Berwick, who was President Obama's adviser on healthcare and recently advised the UK Government on how to deal with the problems in the health service south of the border, said that the programme is

“without doubt one of the most ambitious patient safety initiatives in the world—national in scale, bold in aims, and disciplined in science ... aligned toward a common vision, making Scotland the safest nation on earth from the viewpoint of health care”.

The programme is an outstanding example of how devolution has enabled us to protect the national health service as a genuine public national health service.

Housing is another example. The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 is one of the most significant commitments ever made by any Parliament anywhere to assist homeless people. In 2002, 10,000 homeless households were classed as non-priority cases, with no right to settled accommodation. This year, the figure is zero. All people who are made unintentionally homeless now have a right to settled accommodation.

The housing bill that we will introduce next year is a further step towards making decent housing available for everyone. By removing right-to-buy entitlements, the bill will protect social housing stock. It will also strengthen protection for tenants in the private rented sector by introducing new measures to deal with housing disputes and to regulate the letting industry.

The legislation forms part of a broader commitment from this Government to make decent housing accessible and affordable. During the five years of this session of Parliament, we intend to build 30,000 affordable homes, at least 5,000 of which will be council houses. For those who are interested in statistics—I suspect that that includes the whole chamber—that represents a 66,500 per cent increase on the rate of council house construction under the previous Government, when, famously, six council houses were built in four years, all of them in Shetland.

Those commitments—a truly national health service, decent affordable housing—are part of a wider vision of society that is based on cohesion, not division and on social inclusion, not stigma. That philosophy explains why we have made certain services universally available. Pensioners benefit from free bus travel—that is all pensioners. All of us have the reassurance of free personal care being available when we are older.

In 2007, we established that there were actually 600,000 people earning below £16,000 a year who were liable to pay prescription charges. Many people had to choose which prescribed medicine they could take until the Government restored a national health service free at the point of need.

Students have the right to free education, which enables them to earn and then contribute to society through a fair taxation system.

Those advances are what we like to call the social wage. Services are available to everyone, because everyone contributes to society. The same spirit has influenced other Government policies: no compulsory redundancies in the public sector; the introduction of a living wage; and the council tax freeze to help hard-pressed families.

Some people see the price of such policies, not their value. They say that those social gains are not sustainable. I say that what makes them sustainable is that they are universal—part of a social wage. If they were not universal, those in receipt of the social benefit would be separated and stigmatised, exactly as is happening with the UK Government's welfare agenda. Far from being a something-for-nothing culture, the social wage is a contract that we have with the people of Scotland. To suggest that that is something for nothing is to mimic the bankrupt ideology that prevails in the Westminster Parliament.

The social wage also has an economic benefit. By helping to provide a secure, stable and inclusive society, the public sector will nurture and encourage the talent and ambition of the people. Scotland will be a place in which people want to invest, work and live. The social wage helps to show that prosperity and fairness go together. There is no trade-off between living in a wealthy country and living in a good society.

The social wage is part of the distinctive approach that the Government has taken to supporting recovery in recent years. The Budget (Scotland) Bill will maintain that approach while continuing to drive recovery and long-term economic growth.

We will continue to protect our infrastructure investment programme in the face of the 26 per cent real-terms cut that the UK Government has made to the capital budget. We are supporting more than £10 billion of investment from 2012 to 2015; we are continuing to support key sectors of the economy, such as renewable energy, food and drink, life sciences and tourism; and we are investing in skills. We delivered more than 25,000 modern apprenticeships last year. Ninety-two per cent of those who complete an apprenticeship are still in work six months later.

The success of modern apprenticeships is one reason—just one—why youth unemployment has fallen from 113,000 to 77,000 since Angela Constance was appointed as Europe's only youth employment minister. The figure is still far too high, but we now have one of the better rates in Europe. Across Scotland, central Government, local government, the third sector and the private sector are making young people our business.

The approach that we have taken so far is working. Last month, Ernst & Young reported that our exports are expected to grow at six times the rate of the rest of the UK over the next four years. Our recession was shallower than the UK's, and Scotland is performing better than the rest of the UK on all the major employment measures. The number of inward investment projects that Scotland secured increased by 49 per cent last year. This summer, Ernst & Young commented on the

"ongoing rise in Scotland's relative attractiveness for"

foreign direct investment

"compared to most other areas of the UK."

Members will remember that that is exactly the opposite of George Osborne's infamous prediction in November 2011. Then, he said that the prospect of independence would deter inward investors. He maintained his disastrous record of economic forecasting earlier this week by suggesting that Canada—which has the best-

performing economy in the developed world—was somehow disadvantaged by its independence in comparison with the UK, which has the second-worst-performing economy in the G7. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is in Aberdeen today, continuing that dismal record of forecasting. This morning, I heard him on the radio claiming that Scotland's gross domestic product would be 4 per cent higher in 30 years' time if we stayed under Westminster control.

In fact, as an independent country, Scotland's GDP will be 17 per cent higher in three years' time, when our oil and gas reserves will be counted for the first time in our GDP statistics. That would place us in the top 10 of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries with the highest wealth per head of population. However, within the UK we are severely limited in the measures that we can take to assist recovery and boost GDP. Key fiscal levers such as public capital investment, corporation tax and air passenger duty remain outside our control.

We have shown the potential for a different approach to taxation. A first step of this Government was to establish the most competitive business rates regime anywhere in the UK. We have legislated to replace stamp duty with a more progressive land and buildings transaction tax. We have also introduced the Landfill Tax (Scotland) Bill. The revenue Scotland and tax powers bill will establish revenue Scotland to collect those taxes from 2015. The bill will also put in place a framework that will apply to all devolved taxes.

Over the period to 2020, we estimate that the start-up and operational costs in setting up revenue Scotland will be significantly lower than had we had asked Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to perform the same duties. That could be a sign of the UK's diseconomies of scale. However, that further makes the case for tax powers being controlled and administered from this Parliament.

The establishment of revenue Scotland will be an historic step, but it is only a first step. After all, those devolved taxes—which are the most on offer from Westminster if we stay in the UK—mean that from 2015 Scotland will collect 15 per cent of all taxation revenue, rather than the present 7 per cent. This Parliament would still be a spending rather than a revenue-raising chamber. That is deeply harmful to Scotland; it means that we cannot use fiscal powers to grow our economy.

As I said, the Scottish economy has performed better than the rest of the UK in recent years. In the first quarter of this year, our economy was 2 per cent below its peak output level of 2008, while the UK economy was 3.9 per cent below. It is worth noting that Canada, which, by implication,

George Osborne thinks should merge with the United States of America, was 6.4 per cent above its pre-recession peak.

The contrast between Scotland and the UK and those international ratings demonstrate a truth: this Parliament can mitigate the impact of UK Government policies. Our growth levels can be slightly higher and our employment figures a bit better, but mitigation is what it is. We cannot stop capital spending being slashed; we cannot use taxation policies to encourage business; and we cannot harness all our natural and human resources to build a richer and fairer society.

A further reason why we need independence is that, by next year, the UK Government's welfare reforms will reduce household incomes in Scotland by almost £2 billion a year. Much of that money is taken out of the pockets of those in work and earning low wages. However, last year, the UK Government announced £350 million more spending on the next stage of Trident renewal. That money is barely one third of 1 per cent of the estimated £100,000 million lifetime total cost of the decision to replace the Trident system. How can any Government choose to embark on expenditure of £100,000 million to renew Europe's largest concentration of weapons of mass destruction while reducing benefits for the poorest households across the country? As Margaret Lynch, the chief executive of Citizens Advice Scotland, asked when she spoke of the impact of the cuts on her organisation:

"How is it possible, in the 21st century, in an advanced capitalist economy ... that we have to have volunteer advisers trained in suicide awareness because the welfare state has been ripped asunder?"—[*Official Report, Welfare Reform Committee*, 22 January 2013; c 471.]

This Government is providing almost £8 million of support to advice centres across Scotland, so that they can cope as people in extremis come to them for help. That is one of a number of steps that we have taken to mitigate Westminster's welfare cuts. We have already, jointly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, agreed this year to meet the cost of the UK Government's cut in funding for council tax benefit successor arrangements. That protects more than half a million people on low incomes across Scotland.

This year, we are providing an additional £9 million towards the new Scottish welfare fund, bringing a total of £33 million. The fund helps vulnerable people in a financial emergency and enables people to get household goods to set up home or to remain in their community rather than go into care. In this session, the Scottish welfare fund bill will put the new fund on to a secure and statutory footing, establishing a safety net for vulnerable people across the entire country.

There is a hugely important point there. I talked earlier about how devolution has protected the national health service in Scotland. When we look at the chaos and fragmentation that has been brought about by health reform south of the border, is there anyone who seriously thinks that Westminster should run our health service? When we see the misery and suffering that is being brought about by welfare changes, is there anyone who wants Westminster to retain control of welfare? An independent Scotland will have the wit to develop a welfare system that lets work pay without reducing people to penury or despair.

In addition to the 13 bills that we are introducing this year, the Parliament will consider the Referendum (Scotland) Bill, which provides the legal underpinning for the vote on 18 September next year, when the people of Scotland will decide this country's future. Either a yes vote or a no vote has consequences for the future. The real debate is about how to create a prosperous country and a just society. It is about our attitude towards the disadvantaged and the vulnerable, our welcome for people who want to settle here, our relationship with Europe and the rest of the world, and our strength as a society to which we all contribute and from which we all benefit.

Even more fundamental, independence is about who decides on those questions. The problem for the no campaign is that it will have to explain why an independent Scotland would be uniquely incapable of taking those decisions for ourselves. Why should we rely on a Westminster system to take decisions—many of which, like the bedroom tax, have been utterly misguided—when we have proved over the past 14 years that we, as a Parliament, are more than capable of delivering real progress for the people of Scotland?

In the months ahead, we may well debate our particular views about education, health, employment and welfare reform. However, one thing that the record of this Parliament demonstrates and on which we should all agree is that it is better to decide things for ourselves than to have others decide for us. In my view, the logic of that—completing the powers of this Parliament, that is, independence—is what the people will vote for in 380 days' time.

The value of Scotland's Parliament is demonstrated by this programme for government. That is why I commend it to members. [*Applause.*]

Programme for Government 2013-14

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on the Scottish Government's programme for government.

15:32

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): The First Minister's statement was so uplifting that I almost felt like reaching into Jackie Baillie's handbag for a saltire. *[Laughter.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Johann Lamont: I imagined that during the recess the First Minister might like to re-engage with the real world but he is, on the evidence of his statement today, as distant and delusional about what Scotland is like as he was on the day that he left for the recess.

Despite Andy Murray's best efforts, the summer did not get off to the best of starts for the First Minister. He has kept himself busy by making a series of speeches—each one more ludicrous than the last. We, too, could be like the Isle of Man: independent, but still part of five unions—everything changing, but nothing changing.

In his statement, the First Minister said that it is better for us to make decisions ourselves than to let other people do so, yet he is happy to cede economic policy, fiscal policy and monetary policy to a Westminster Treasury team. He knows that that does not make sense, and the members who sit behind him know it even better.

Over the recess, Alex Salmond made clear what his one priority is. It is not health, not education and not economic growth, but a referendum on independence—

Members: Where were you?

Johann Lamont: I will tell members where I was: I was listening—*[Interruption.]* You see, the difference is that when someone listens to people and understands what is happening in their lives, it informs their politics—not a project that they have been interested in for the past 40 years. It is not about talking to people, but about listening to their lived experience. The First Minister's priority is just a referendum on independence. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Can we have a little bit of calm, please?

Johann Lamont: I know that that is the line that SNP members have been given and they have done very well at shouting it. Let us get on.

Today was an opportunity for the First Minister to draw a line under that summer of woe and to

show us that we could take him seriously as Scotland's First Minister. He could have done that by bringing forward a legislative programme that met one crucial test: to put the interests of the people of Scotland before the Scottish National Party's interests. With this unambitious, lacklustre and moribund programme, he has completely failed.

This morning, Nicola Sturgeon described the programme as "radical". I can think only that she has led a very sheltered life. I bow to no one in my interest in a bill on electronic signatures, and I am as interested in merging Historic Scotland as the next person, but nobody can pretend that such measures are "radical". As the First Minister often reminds us, he won an unprecedented majority in May 2011, but he uses that power to put Scotland on pause.

We no longer have a Government—we have a campaign. It is a campaign that will do anything not to rock the boat ahead of next year's vote, despite the challenges that we face, as a country.

As I have said, the First Minister made a series of speeches this summer. None of them spoke about the pressures on our health service and his plan to ensure that our care is not affected as a result of those. Indeed, listening to and reflecting on what the First Minister said in the passage in his statement on promoting fairness in the NHS and its safety programme, I was trying to work out whether he was totally insensitive, whether he was complacent or whether he actually lives in the real world at all. There was no mention of the concerns of staff and patients about hospital mortality rates—especially the concerns of the staff and patients in the constituency of his Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. The First Minister waxes lyrical about his vision for Scotland, but he does not do the basic job of Government in addressing those problems.

This week, teachers have warned us that pressure on school resources will impact on education standards—in particular for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, we know the Scottish Government's solution; Mike Russell has told us that he cannot do a thing to improve our schools until after independence.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I did not say that.

Johann Lamont: We want the Government to address the concerns of people in the real world—I point out to Mike Russell that he went to the University of Glasgow and said in a press release that he could not do anything about schools until after independence. He ought not to deny that now.

On care, when I exposed the scandal of 15-minute care visits, the minister who is responsible, Michael Matheson, told me that it was an “old chestnut”. Since then, care workers have spoken out about the pressures that they face in being told to task and go, and not to speak to elderly people who are isolated in their homes. It turns out that Michael Matheson is partly right about 15-minute visits; in some areas, the visits are down to seven minutes. That is a scandal and an affront to all of us, and it should be the business of Government to address it. Instead of telling us that everything is fantastic, it should use the powers that it has to make a difference. When are we going to face up to this challenge? Not any time soon, by the sounds of it.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will Johann Lamont give way?

Johann Lamont: I will take Mr Mason in a moment.

On childcare, although we welcome the move to 600 hours, we would also welcome money for local authorities to deliver them—or we would welcome, at least, John Swinney outlining for us what our councils will have to cut from their budgets to pay for that promise. However, we know that that will not be enough to make a difference to families’ lives. How do we know that? The First Minister has told us that we will get a childcare revolution, but only after—you guessed it—independence. We have to address concerns right now.

On the bedroom tax, which was dreamed up by the Tories—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order!

Johann Lamont: Cue noises off.

The depressing thing is that the SNP has not lifted a finger to help people. It would take only £50 million to protect the most vulnerable tenants in Scotland from that unfair and unjust tax, but again we must wait until after independence. We have offered to work with the Scottish Government on the matter, but it has rejected us.

Today, Wonga has announced profits of £62.5 million. Where are the funds for a loan guarantee fund to stop people falling into the hands of the extortionate legal money lenders?

Young people are looking for the skills and qualifications that are needed in a tough jobs market. Where is the plan for our colleges, which have been decimated by the Government over the past few years? For the young people who depend on it, it will ring very hollow that the First Minister believes that we have free education in Scotland. If a person does not have access to a place, there is not much at all that is free about education.

Nicola Sturgeon said this morning that there is a programme for economic growth. I am sorry: the Government must do more than just say that for it to happen. A feature of the SNP Government is that it tells us that it is doing things, but it lives with a different world out there. There are unacceptable levels of unemployment, there is underemployment, people are stuck on low wages and there are zero-hours contracts. Where in the programme is the action to help people?

What could the Government do now to make a difference to people’s lives, instead of spending all its energy, enthusiasm and commitment in persuading people to vote for independence? If its members were to remember that they are parliamentarians rather than nationalists, they might know where to start.

Jenny Marra wants to produce measures to tackle the shame of human trafficking. Drew Smith is proposing an opt-out organ-donation system that could save many Scottish lives. Patricia Ferguson proposes to reform our fatal accident inquiry system to ensure that families are looked after when they lose a loved one. Iain Gray proposes to regulate our buses so that those who rely on public transport can get a bus when they need it. Richard Simpson is proposing a raft of measures to save lives by tackling Scotland’s unhealthy relationship with alcohol. Neil Findlay is taking steps to give people confidence in our politics again by reforming lobbying rules. Mark Griffin is proposing changes to help British Sign Language users.

The First Minister, with Scotland’s devolved powers, has the ability to do so much more, but his Government turns the other way. He is always telling us what he cannot do, rather than what he can do. He talks positively about devolution but either does not understand it or does not want it. He wants to frame the debate as though the choice is between Scotland and the Tories.

The First Minister denies that one of the great successes of devolution was when a Labour Government funded record levels of public services, which we were then allowed to deliver in our communities. He is a man who lacks even self-awareness. He tells us that Parliament listens to evidence and seeks consensus where possible. If only that were true. If it were true, his ludicrous, ill-thought-through and dangerous proposals for independence would have been flung out long ago.

The First Minister says that his referendum will give the people of Scotland the chance to finish our home rule journey. He takes for himself—ironically—the successes of devolution, which were delivered by those who are committed to staying in the United Kingdom, not by those who want to leave it.

The strange thing is that neither the First Minister nor the SNP were ever on that home rule journey. They would not sign the claim of right—I know because I was there. Alex Salmond stood outside the Scottish Constitutional Convention and had nothing to do with the Calman commission. I signed the claim of right; he absented himself from it. The truth is that Alex Salmond and the SNP refused to be part of the journey that set up the Parliament. They stood apart from the will of the Scottish people and those of us who fought for devolution. The irony is that those who are driven by a desire to take power closer to people through devolution are now witnessing a Scottish Government that pulls power to itself instead of empowering people. Why so timid on community empowerment? The SNP again stands apart from the will and ambitions of the Scottish people.

If there was any doubt that the SNP does not believe in devolution and this Parliament, it is its legislative programme. There is nothing in it to address the real needs of the Scottish people, there is nothing progressive, there is nothing radical and there is no attempt to exploit the Parliament's full powers. Why is that? It is because it is not in Alex Salmond's interests to prove what the Parliament can currently do, or to show that our lives can be improved by devolution. We all know that week in, week out, minister after minister says, "Well, that's a very interesting problem. We'll solve it after independence." They damn themselves with their own words.

All Scotland knows that Alex Salmond will always put his own interests ahead of those of the people of Scotland. The First Minister puts his referendum ahead of Scotland's needs. That is why the legislative programme is as thin as his case for separation. The First Minister has decided that Scotland must wait until after the referendum for any of our needs to be addressed. His back benchers must ask themselves whether they are parliamentarians or placemen and placemen, because surely they can see that they are standing up for Salmond, rather than standing up for Scotland.

The depressing fact is that Scotland is on pause while we wait for Alex Salmond's referendum, and families across my constituency and across the country are having to wait for action until the referendum comes. That is a denial of the First Minister's responsibilities. I remind him that this battle is Scotland versus Salmond, and Scotland is going to win.

15:46

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): Perhaps we should not be surprised that in the same breath as the First Minister celebrates the success in tackling unemployment in Scotland, he claims that the UK

Government's approach, which is fundamental to delivering economic growth, is all wrong for Scotland. The UK delivers for Scotland, yet it chokes the First Minister to admit that we are moving in the right direction, thanks to the action of the coalition in Whitehall. Despite that, in the same breath he said that he would keep the economic underpinnings of the pound sterling and the Bank of England.

It is with deep irony that a legislative programme has been presented that will mean that the parliamentary year will be marked not by the introduction of new laws to materially improve the lives of Scots, but by the Scottish Government's obsession with the break-up of the United Kingdom and its white paper on independence, so this parliamentary session will be dominated by something that could not possibly be considered until more than a year from now. Clearly, I hope that it will never be considered.

We await the white paper's appearance with interest. Planning for the break-up of the most successful political, economic and social union that the world has ever seen will take some time, but from the evidence of the Government's programme, there has been time for little else, and the governance of Scotland is all but on hold. For unionists like me, that is the great tragedy of the referendum campaign, because at a time when we should be getting on with the job that the vast majority of the people of Scotland want us to do—working together to make Scotland a better place—valuable Government time is being spent on planning for something that even large numbers of SNP voters reject.

If we glance back at the SNP's manifesto for the 2011 election, it shows us how many promises the party still has to honour. We should remember that we are talking about an Administration that has an overall majority that allows it to do anything that it wants with the powers at its disposal.

What happened to the grandiose promises to help to create new retail banks and to support social banking? Nothing. What about the promise to create the UK's most competitive business taxation system? It has resulted in a new retail tax that will instead burden Scottish businesses with a £95 million disadvantage. There was also a pledge to create a simple town centre regeneration fund. I am sorry, but that is still under generation.

What about the promise to increase Scottish exports by 50 per cent in six years? The daddy of them all is the non-profit distributing scheme, which, it was promised, would in its first two years deliver up to £500 million of investment in building projects such as schools and hospitals, but which has so far produced only about £20 million of investment.

From what I can see from the programme that has been presented today, there is no intention to make good on those pledges any time soon. Instead, we have two new bills about the governance of public bodies and four bills on technical changes to the administration of law.

The proposed community empowerment and renewal bill makes great play of strengthening community voices, but will that mean that the Scottish Government will stop riding roughshod over communities when it comes to wind farm applications? Although the bill talks about streamlining community right to buy in the accompanying housing bill, that right is being taken away from individuals. In fact, in that housing bill we will see the abolition of the right to buy, which was the most empowering legislation passed in this country for a generation and which created a property-owning democracy. The First Minister talks about what is democratically right for this country, yet he seeks to deny its people the one thing that gave them real economic and social freedom. Thanks to the Conservative Party, thousands of people took control of their own lives, unshackled as they were from the whims of local authorities' determination to control every aspect of their lives.

Indeed, it is also thanks in large part to the Conservative Party that the proposed revenues Scotland and tax powers bill is necessary to establish a system for dealing with the new tax-raising powers that will come to the Scottish Parliament in 2015. That is in response to the Scotland Act 2012 and the biggest transfer of fiscal powers for 300 years, which has been enacted by a Conservative-led UK Government.

It is thanks, too, to the Scottish Conservatives that we have those 1,000 police officers of which the First Minister spoke. It is also thanks to the Scottish Conservatives that the council tax freeze happened. We also called for action to improve the care for pre-school children and we are glad to see some recognition of the problems in that crucial phase of life in the continuing passage of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

It is therefore to be regretted that amidst the rhetoric about a commitment to education there is nothing in the programme that directly addresses the continuing underachievement of the thousands of young people who are leaving the education system unable to read, write or count properly. It is a stain on this country, with its once proud reputation for educational excellence, that approximately a fifth of our young people leave school functionally illiterate. Apart from improving life chances and employability by putting in more effort to tackle illiteracy, it would make us better able to tackle the challenges that are faced by the police and justice system in dealing with offenders.

Today, we have learned from the First Minister that the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill will now include the abolition of automatic early release for serious offenders. He rightly says that that practice no longer commands public respect. It is something about which the Scottish Conservatives have been ceaseless in our criticism. Unfortunately, despite promises not just in the First Minister's 2011 manifesto but in his 2007 manifesto, the change will not extend to all offenders. Indeed, long-term sentences of over four years, which the First Minister talked about, accounted for just 3 per cent of sentences handed down last year. So, when 97 per cent of custodial sentences will be untouched by the change, it should be no surprise to the First Minister that we will continue to argue that the reduction of prison terms passed by our courts should in principle be a reward and not a right.

As one welcome measure is introduced—albeit taking baby steps—a fundamental liberty could be at risk from another bill. It is the plan under the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill to abolish the safeguard of corroboration in criminal trials without a full review of the law of evidence—something that we believe is essential if the change is not to lead to miscarriages of justice in the future. The precious principle of innocent until guilt is proved must be protected, but there is a real risk that it will be sacrificed to secure more convictions, in particular for sex crimes. Of course, we all want all offenders to be caught and punished, but the price must not be the removal of liberty from the blameless.

I urge the First Minister, if he will not listen to members of this Parliament, to listen to the Scottish legal profession. The Law Society of Scotland and the Faculty of Advocates have argued that the proposal will lead to miscarriages of justice without significant change in criminal procedure. Removal of corroboration from Scots law will potentially leave Scotland with one of the lowest levels of protection against wrongful conviction in the western world. So, we urge the Scottish Government not to introduce the change without undertaking a wider review of the law of evidence.

The First Minister says in his programme's foreword:

"It is now time to extend the advantages of self-government".

I agree with that but, sadly, the programme is notable not for what it achieves but for what it does not achieve. It does little to extend the advantages that he has, because it is not in his interests to make devolution work as we believe it can. It is in his narrow self-interest to hold back this country, to limit its ambitions within the framework of the United Kingdom and to present a

deliberately negative and uninspiring picture of Scotland. We do not recognise his view of a nation that is trodden on by its bigger neighbour, but we do see a thriving nation that is playing a crucial and enthusiastic role in the continued development of the fully integrated family of nations of these islands.

The First Minister says that he is ambitious for Scotland but, sadly, this programme shows that that ambition is more for him than for his country.

15:55

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): With more than 50,000 incidents a year, domestic violence is far too prevalent in Scotland. Too many women and men suffer behind closed doors, and often in silence. On this first day of the new parliamentary term, we should signal our renewed determination to root out the problem. I would welcome new proposals from the Government on how we can do more to tackle domestic violence in our country, on education to help people to identify abusive relationships, on reviewing guidelines on prosecution for domestic violence, and on funding for the range of organisations and facilities that support people who find themselves in abusive relationships.

I am pleased that the Scottish Parliament will be given an early opportunity to vote on equal marriage. It is a mark of a modern, open, tolerant and liberal society that those who wish to get married can do so. Churches will have the power and the right not to participate in such ceremonies. Individuals will also be protected if they do not wish to conduct such ceremonies, even if their church wants to.

John Mason: Is Willie Rennie assured by the reassurances that have been given that ministers, clerics and even denominations will not be dragged through the courts because the European Court of Human Rights can make the ultimate decision?

Willie Rennie: I am. The appropriate measures will be taken at Westminster to introduce changes to the Equality Act 2010, which will protect the individuals about whom John Mason talked. We need to ensure that Scotland joins the nations of the world that have equal marriage on the statute book, because it is a mark of the modern society that I want Scotland to become.

I would like the Scottish Parliament to match what is happening on childcare in England. This week, thousands of two-year-olds in England will get the chance—the right—to have 15 hours of nursery education each week. The First Minister has denied Scottish children that, but he could change all that. He could concede that Professor James Heckman is right when he says that the

best education investment takes place before the age of three. There is an opportunity to improve young people's life chances through education. If the First Minister wanted to, he could include such a proposal in his legislative programme.

In his statement, the First Minister spent much time on outlining new—and sometimes old—initiatives on community empowerment, which is close to my heart. I am sure that we will look carefully at the proposals that he makes, and that we will support measures to give communities more powers. However, the reality and the record are something different, after the centralisation of our police and fire services, which was one of the biggest transfers of power from local government to central Government since devolution—so much for community empowerment.

Recent news has shown that the economy is on the mend and that we are moving towards recovery. This morning, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development gave a positive assessment of growth. Substantial progress has been made on the UK Government's plan to cut the deficit, which has since 2010 reduced by a third as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Significant progress has been made in the past year on job creation and reducing unemployment. Although the Scottish figures wobble from month to month, it is clear that we are benefiting from the 1 million new private sector jobs that have been created across the UK.

The challenges that are faced by the hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland who are still out of work need to be met by our two Governments working together. I support much of what the Scottish Government does on growth and employment, but it is important that it and its agencies promote the UK schemes that are available in Scotland, too. For example, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills survey shows that there are fewer companies in Scotland with apprentices than there are in the rest of the UK.

Scottish businesses will get £2,000 off their national insurance from next April because of the changes that the UK Government is making. I want ministers in both Governments to promote that so that small businesses think about using the savings to take on an apprentice or another employee.

I also want to hear Scottish ministers telling Scottish companies about the £1 billion youth contract that provides businesses with up to £2,275 per person for a job, training or work experience, and about the funding-for-lending scheme and the business bank, which will provide billions of pounds of low-cost capital.

There is also the UK enterprise capital fund, which is worth £200 million, and the annual investment allowance for plant and machinery, which is being increased from £25,000 to £250,000 for two years. The UK Green Investment Bank, which is based in Edinburgh, has £3.8 billion-worth of UK Government money to help to unblock the financing of renewables projects. It is my hope that the Scottish Government will work closely with the UK Government to maximise those opportunities for Scotland.

The next 12 months will set the course of this country for the next 300 years and more. The power that is vested in the hands of the people who live in our great nation is immense. I am in no doubt that everyone in this chamber wants the best for Scotland; we just disagree on how we want to achieve it. My support for a strong Scottish Parliament with home rule in a strong partnership with the United Kingdom is on the record. The stakes are high and the risks are great, but the opportunity of a renewed constitutional settlement within the UK is within our grasp.

16:01

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I thank the Government for advance sight of the First Minister's statement, much of which concentrated on the referendum next year. It is quite right that both sides continue to make arguments to further their case and Greens will continue to argue for the principle of decentralisation: that decisions should be made as close as possible to those whom they affect. I hope that we can all make our arguments with the mutual respect that best facilitates the debate among us and among all those in Scotland outside the Parliament who will really decide.

It is important, however, that we spend time making the best use of the powers that we already have. The way in which we develop the economy is extremely important, and I am pleased to hear the First Minister make the argument that looking after the health and wellbeing of Scotland's people and creating an inclusive society in which the maximum number of people can participate is key to making Scotland flourish.

When Professor Stiglitz spoke to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee in February he emphasised the importance of using a dashboard of indicators to measure a society's success. We must aim not to create growth in the economy purely for growth's sake. People want high-quality, meaningful, secure and well-paid jobs with full employment rights; warm, secure homes with secure tenancies; first-class education and health services; and a clean environment in which to

live—not an extra percentage point on GDP that benefits only a few.

Scotland's national performance framework gives us hope that we can lose the tunnel vision that GDP imposes and emphasise the things that make people's lives better and more fulfilling. Measuring median household income is one practical change that we could easily make to help to ensure that our economic policy benefits more people.

Government is expected to deliver across a wide spectrum of social, environmental and economic outcomes; public procurement accounts for £9 billion of spending a year and should be expected to do the same. We are constrained by European Union procurement rules, but we must not use that as an excuse for not making progress with the forthcoming procurement bill. It is our responsibility to make Scottish procurement work hard for Scottish society and for our environment and economy.

It is very important that our small and microbusinesses are better able to access public procurement contracts and compete for work. Small, locally owned businesses create a resilient economy and they are more likely to hold on to and value staff and less likely to disappear off seeking the next big tax break or subsidy. Ministers might not get to stand in front of the latest new thing cutting the ribbon, but there is substantial evidence to support the wisdom of investing in smaller local-level infrastructure projects as the best way to help people to create jobs and to help the economy.

I will be interested to look in more detail at today's statement and at the impacts of the planned bills on women and children. We need to understand how a legislative programme or a policy change benefits different sections of society. We already know that the coalition Government is imposing a gendered austerity on Britain. The cuts affect men and women, but it is women who are chiefly being hit—hit through the loss of benefits, hit through the loss of public sector jobs and hit as they are expected to fill the gap left by underfunded care and community services.

The Scottish Government published its own gender analysis of the UK cuts last week. I hope that that will be replicated for other areas of policy. A gender analysis of this year's budget would be a welcome addition. Gender comes into play across almost all areas of society, including starkly in health and sport. Last month's *British Medical Journal* reported that only 38 per cent of seven-year-old girls in Scotland engage in an hour's worth of physical activity each day, compared with 63 per cent of boys.

Significantly more men than women cycle, and only proper investment in safe junctions and segregated cycle lanes will convince more people that cycling will improve, not endanger, their health. The Government must increase spend on cycling and walking infrastructure or the target of 10 per cent of journeys to be made by bike by 2020 will remain a vague and unsupported vision. Many people in Scotland cannot afford to or do not want to have to rely on a private car. They want transport justice and they want investment in public transport to be increased to ensure that the Government does not continue to miss climate targets.

The First Minister also talked of decentralisation and building strong local democracy. So far, the Government has failed to convince me and many others that it is really committed in this area. I find it deeply ironic that a Government that is campaigning for full independence has, in effect, removed local authorities' ability to raise the revenue that they need to fund local services properly. We do not want a mini-Westminster here. Devolution must not stop here in Holyrood.

The community empowerment and renewal bill should help clubs such as Musselburgh Windsor to take over the changing facilities that it needs. It should allow input from and engagement with those who want to contribute to improving and running local activities, to working with the NHS on hospital community gardens and to using vacant land for allotments, working alongside local authorities and others. However, we need to ensure that communities have sufficient capacity and support to make that a reality.

Scottish Greens look forward to progress on equal marriage and on childcare, which is much needed. The proposed bills on welfare additions, food standards and housing are welcome, too.

I do not have time to cover everything that I would like to, but I look forward to listening to the rest of the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I call Mark McDonald, to be followed by James Kelly. Speeches should be six minutes or thereby, please.

16:07

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside): This is my first speech in the Parliament since the Donside by-election. [*Applause.*] It is important that I begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Brian Adam, who, as we all know, had tributes paid to him in the Parliament at the time of his passing. Brian was a great source of encouragement and inspiration for me during my time as an activist and then as a city councillor, when I worked closely with him. He was a man

who always put the communities of his constituency at the forefront, and that is something that I aim to do in following in his footsteps.

The Aberdeen Donside constituency is something of a microcosm for many of the issues that affect the wider Scotland. Its social dynamics, which members will have seen as they came to campaign, range from the affluent to the areas of poverty that still exist within what is regarded outside Aberdeen as a rich city. We still have what my colleague Kevin Stewart has oft described as poverty amidst plenty within the city of Aberdeen.

I spent the summer going round my constituency and talking to various groups in the community about issues that affect them and, turning to the legislative programme that lies before us, I note that much in it will be of interest and benefit to the communities that I represent. It was interesting to note Johann Lamont claiming that Scotland is now on pause. I think that it is worth noting that Ms Lamont seemed to spend the entire summer on mute. The community empowerment and renewal bill will offer significant opportunities for community groups and organisations across Scotland. I echo some of what Alison Johnstone said about that. I hope that it will allow, for example, the development of community gardens and play facilities, and allow sports clubs to come together to develop facilities on land that is currently unused.

Those are the kind of opportunities that we want to see being unlocked, because there often seems to be far too much bureaucratic process lying in the way of that happening. I hope that legislation can be introduced that will allow such groups to take control of resources within their communities and operate them for the benefit of people in their communities.

One of the other interesting and very welcome elements of the legislative programme is the airgun licensing. I encountered that issue during my time in Aberdeen as a parliamentary researcher and latterly as a councillor. It was being pushed very hard by Norman Collie, a Labour councillor at that time, in relation to a potential City of Aberdeen byelaw to deal with the issue.

I was delighted to receive Norman Collie's backing and endorsement during the course of the Donside by-election campaign and I am sure that he would be equally delighted to learn of the progress that is being made on airgun licensing in this Parliament. It is a demonstration of this Parliament taking action in Scotland to deal with priorities that have been identified within Scotland.

I noticed George Osborne's visit to my constituency today. He trotted out the claim that we do not need to look at taking control of oil in

Scotland because it is already benefiting Scotland, apparently. If he took the time while visiting my constituency to go and knock the doors in areas such as Middlefield and Cummings Park, he would encounter many individuals who are feeling the sharp end of his welfare reform and austerity agenda.

What we need to do is less of the taking away of the benefits from people and more to ensure that those who are in work—

Ruth Davidson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: No, no, no. We need to do more to ensure that those who are in work and who rely on in-work benefits because of poor pay are lifted out of that depressing cycle. That is a way to reduce the benefit bill and improve the lot of people. It would be far better if we saw George Osborne acting on that, rather than coming to preach to Scotland. That is why the legislative underpinning of the welfare fund is welcome—albeit depressing, because it highlights the idea that pervades the unionist parties that the function of the chamber should be to mitigate bad decisions taken at Westminster using only the small array of tools at our disposal.

If that lack of self-belief and vision is so inherent in the no campaign, it is little wonder that its supporters cannot lift their eyes to the horizon and look at the future that Scotland could see and could realise, were the chamber possessed of the full powers of independence to take decisions on behalf of the people who elect us.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: Very briefly.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the member for taking an intervention. The Scottish welfare fund has of course been devolved to Scotland by the UK Government. How can the member explain the fact that the Scottish Government cannot seem to spend it?

Mark McDonald: In an interesting twist of fate, the Scottish welfare fund is also being administered via Scotland's local authorities. I am sure that the member will welcome that, given that she is so concerned about giving powers to local authorities. Perhaps if the member gets on the blower to her local Labour council and gets it to do more to promote the welfare fund, she might find that it would start to spend some of that money on the people who need it the most.

The eyes of the world will be on us over the next 12 months as we shape up for the independence referendum. We stand ready to join the family of nations as a full member, but again we find self-belief and vision so lacking as Alistair Darling

claims that Scotland would struggle on the world stage and would not have the reputation of the UK in international affairs. I am not entirely sure that that is necessarily a bad thing, but it is worth pausing to look at nations around us. If we look at the pivotal role played by Norway during the course of the Middle East peace process and at the exemplary record of Ireland when it comes to contributions to United Nations peacekeeping missions, we see that being a big country waving its guns around and swaggering on the world stage does not necessarily make that country a key contributor to world affairs.

All too often, the UK's reputation is that of one who hides behind the playground bully and occasionally peeks out to say "Yeah" in support. That is not the reputation that I want for Scotland on the international stage. We can do better; we will do better.

16:14

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): You would think that ministers, in considering the programme for Government, might have taken some time over the recess to exit their offices to look at what is actually happening in the country. If they had done so, they would have seen the cost-of-living crisis due to the 6.4 per cent real-terms drop in wages that workers are having to suffer, the 25 per cent drop in the number of homes built, resulting in a housing crisis with a potential shortfall of 160,000 homes in 2035, and the scandal of zero-hours contracts whereby workers are being exploited.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

James Kelly: Let me make some progress.

None of those issues is addressed in the programme for Government. The SNP Government and its back benchers have become a team of one-trick ponies, the record stuck on continually playing the tune of independence.

The procurement bill—legislation that is being introduced—does not exactly inspire confidence. As Alison Johnstone quite rightly said, we need to look at how the £9 billion that is spent on public procurement could be spent advantageously for local economies. However, we can hardly be inspired with confidence when we see that Sir Peter Housden is being required to appear before the Public Audit Committee tomorrow to explain £500 million of unreported cost—£0.5 billion is hardly an amount of money that might be lost down the back of the settee. How can we have confidence in procurement when there is no control and transparency in key transport projects?

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

James Kelly: I will give way to Mark McDonald, who is no doubt fresh from the Haudagain

roundabout. He probably had to leave last Tuesday to reach the Parliament today.

Mark McDonald: I thank the member for giving way. He mentioned zero-hours contracts, pay and conditions and expenditure on housing. Can he remind us where, in relation to this Parliament, decisions on employment and capital spending are taken?

James Kelly: On the issue of what this Parliament is responsible for, the member might want to look at the Borders rail project and some of the examples of zero-hours contracts there. That is a Scottish Government responsibility.

In the procurement bill, the Scottish Government should be looking at addressing some of those issues. How can we introduce a living wage to some of the contracts that are being handed out by the Scottish Government? How can we tackle the issue of blacklisting—something that SNP MSPs were silent on before the recess? It is an absolute scandal that trade unionists should be penalised for their activities by being blacklisted. We should be examining that issue closely. We should also look seriously at how we can support apprenticeships and training programmes not only to help businesses, but to support young people and the economy. Labour will examine those issues in the procurement bill.

There is a complete absence from the programme of anything to do with buses, which are a big issue in local communities. We know why that is. The SNP Government has cut the reimbursement rates for concessionary travel, so routes are being cut—bus operators in my constituency have told me that. That means that pensioners and people in local communities are being left stranded without bus services. SNP members' attitude to that is to shut their eyes and to pretend that it is not happening. Some of the proposals in Iain Gray's proposed bus regulation (Scotland) bill would help to tackle those issues.

The tragedy is that the SNP's obsession with independence has undermined our ability as a Parliament to deal with the issues that affect hundreds of thousands of Scots. While we were mired in a housing crisis, the Parliament was taking time to debate the 10-year anniversary of the Iraq war. While thousands of food parcels are handed out in communities every week, the First Minister and his Government have armies of civil servants looking at the independence referendum. While pensioners are stranded as a result of bus routes being axed, the Government rushes out yet another consultation.

To sum up, the SNP Government is too busy talking to itself instead of standing up for Scotland. This is not the time for a time out. The Scottish Government needs a plan of action now that

addresses the anxieties and problems of Scotland's communities in 2013.

16:20

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): As we look on, virtually helpless, we see Iain Duncan Smith and his coalition colleagues damning the most vulnerable to a future of hopelessness and financial misery. While the bankers and Tory donors are bought off with tax dispensations and bonuses, the poor, the sick and the struggling must be made to pay for that. In the post-war years, with the national health service and family allowance coming on stream, there was a belief that Government was beginning to turn around the great divide between rich and poor and north and south. Now, we should look at what has happened in the space of just a few months. Not only has any sort of movement towards equality and a real diminution of child poverty—an issue that the Scottish Parliament has made good efforts to tackle since its instigation—been arrested but the tide has been reversed.

It can hardly come as a surprise to the UK Government's leaders that women and families are disproportionately affected by that Government's benefit reform programme.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I agree with much of what the member says, but the change has not been over a few months; instead, it has been decades since the post-war consensus was thrown out. Arguments such as those for tax competition have been a big part of the reason why we have moved away from the trend towards equality. Should not Scotland reject such arguments rather than attempt a new generation of the same thing?

Christina McKelvie: Patrick Harvie makes a relevant point, but the points that I will go on to outline are about the changes in the past few months. I take on board completely what the member says about the past decades, but the changes that I will talk about have happened in the past few months.

Last week, a National Children's Bureau report showed that up to 1.5 million more children are growing up in poor households now than in 1973. That is UK progress for us. We have the freeze on child benefit; the benefit cap; the reduction in the proportion of childcare costs that are covered by working tax credit; the increase in the taper rate for all tax credits; the removal of the baby element of child tax credits; the requirement for lone parents on income support with a youngest child aged five to move to jobseekers allowance; and the abolition of the health in pregnancy grant. That is all before the assault of the bedroom tax on families who have the audacity to give their two

children separate rooms or, for those with disabilities, space for special equipment. Those are all attacks on equality for women in our society.

As the Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said last week, the Scottish Government is doing all that it can to mitigate the problem using the resources and powers that are available to it. So we have the tale of two Governments and the choice of two futures. We are at a crossroads for our nation. One choice is an SNP Government that is providing an extra £9.2 million towards the new £33 million Scottish welfare fund. That fund has already helped more than 20,000 people and it has the capacity to support about 200,000 people. We should all be promoting that fund with our local authorities. I commend the fact that the welfare fund is being put on a statutory footing.

However, our powers are limited. Only with a yes vote can Scotland's Government set about creating a fair, caring and compassionate welfare system that does not punish those who are sick, poor or vulnerable. Our approach will, I believe, be positive, constructive and supportive, rather than one that implies blame or that labels people as benefit scroungers. Everyone will be working for and will be supported by the Scottish common weal.

As colleagues in the Parliament are aware, I have a close and very personal interest in the lives of those who suffer from motor neurone disease. On average, victims of MND live for 14 months from diagnosis. Those sufferers, having been assaulted in 2008 by the work capability assessment, now have to be put through the mill of Department for Work and Pensions welfare benefits assessments, questionnaires and appeals as well as the worry that they might not be able to support themselves financially through such a traumatic time.

It seems downright malevolent to force a terminally ill person to go through that, and that is to say nothing of the waste of taxpayers' money. People with MND do not get better; they get worse and they die, but the Westminster Government believes that, unless someone is likely to die within six months, they are not terminally ill and they might well be considered fit for work—as many MND sufferers have been told—and have their benefits withdrawn.

Then there is the bedroom tax. They lose their jobs because they are no longer physically capable of work. They need special adaptations to cope at home. They need kit like a wheelchair or breathing equipment to keep them safe overnight and it all takes up a lot of space in their bedrooms. Not surprisingly, their carers—who are probably their spouses—have to give up their work to look after them and need a second room to catch up on

the much-needed sleep that they require to care for the person through the day. For that privilege, the family is expected to pay £12 a week.

Lord Freud—members know him: he was employed by the Tories on the other side of the chamber and continued in employment by the Tories on this side of the chamber—said in a letter to me this week that the options that people have

“in some cases could include taking in a lodger, finding work or increasing their hours of work.”

How disgustingly out of touch he is. Not only that, he directly contradicted his Prime Minister.

It does not take a rocket scientist to work out that child poverty and discrimination against the most vulnerable and poorest in our society increase the gap between rich and poor. The no parties need to ask themselves whether they really want to back policies that are designed to militate against the most needy and to reward the wealthiest.

With independence comes the responsibility and freedom for Scotland to make its own choices and to introduce policies that do not condemn to social exclusion those who are already struggling. At the last count, we were talking about 80,000 of Scotland's most vulnerable families. The UK is the fourth most unequal country in the developed world. An independent Scotland would be the fourth most equal, resting alongside other small independent nations such as Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

What does the no campaign have to offer? It offers a continuation of the increasing divergences between the rich, who get richer, and the poor, who get poorer.

We have a choice of two futures. I say choose independence and choose a fairer Scotland.

16:26

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Dare I say that it is good to be back? The summer recess is often our only opportunity to pause, take stock and come back with fresh ideas—although I admit that I ended up with a little more time than I expected.

There is much in the Government's programme that my Labour colleagues and I welcome. Although the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill could go further, it will, we hope, make a difference to the provision of care for three and four-year-olds. The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Bill will bring to the fore once again the discussion about how we deliver social care. The proposed community empowerment and renewal bill could provide an opportunity to involve local communities in their own decision making. However, that does not feel like the sort of legislative programme that will tackle the major

problems that face Scotland—the economy, the cost of living and inequality—or create the sort of modern Scotland that many, if not most, members wish to see.

The countdown clocks in SNP headquarters may be clicking over the 380 days to next September, but the legislative programme suggests that many have forgotten that there are still 1,000 days left in government. That is 1,000 days to modernise our education system, to get young people off the dole and into work and to rebuild confidence in our besieged college sector. It is 1,000 days to change the way in which business is conducted in Scotland, to support small businesses and not multinationals, to protect workers from zero-hours contracts and to introduce a strategic plan to create a living wage programme. It is 1,000 days to implement radical land reform the likes of which we saw in the early days of the Parliament, to promote community ownership, to encourage new co-operative and collaborative ways of delivering the rail system and to protect bus users with robust regulation.

I admit to having a little laugh at my career trajectory from Government supporter to shadow minister to Opposition back bencher. However, I suggest to SNP colleagues who may believe that they are enjoying the political good times that one is never more conscious of the opportunity to make a difference than when that opportunity is taken away. By that, I simply mean that they should make the most of their time in Government. They should not put all their political eggs in the basket of independence and be disappointed when they break.

There is much that we can do right here and right now to help the people of Scotland. Mr Brown, the Minister for Transport and Veterans, is currently presiding over the allocation of the Scottish rail passenger franchise. At more than £2.5 billion pounds, it is one of the biggest contracts that the Scottish Government handles, and I know that I am not alone in believing that we could get better value and a better service for that money.

We can agree across this chamber that it is neither fair nor right that a Dutch or German Government-owned firm can bid for the franchise but that a Scottish Government-owned firm cannot. However, where we seem to part company is that I believe that we can do more than just rail—pardon the pun—against the iniquities of rail privatisation and an unsympathetic Tory Government; I believe that we can do something about it. The power to award the franchise lies with this Government here in Scotland and this Parliament here in Holyrood.

In the next few weeks, the Co-operative Party and others, including the Associated Society of

Locomotive Engineers and Firemen—ASLEF—intend to publish a document highlighting the many benefits that would flow to the Scottish public, rail passengers and our industry and transport infrastructure if only we were to pursue a more collaborative and co-operative approach to the running of this public service. I ask only that Mr Brown, his ministerial colleagues and the many SNP MSPs who I believe will be sympathetic look at the document with a view to shaping the way in which they award the new passenger franchise. It is a decision that is likely to be in place for the next 10 years. Once taken, it is unlikely that the referendum—whatever way the vote goes—will affect it, so why not start shaping the new Scotland right now?

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I have not read the document but it sounds like I might be sympathetic to that argument. However, does Mr Macintosh agree that, although the awarding of the franchise is devolved, the terms of the franchise are hugely encumbered by the fact that they are set by Westminster at this moment in time?

Ken Macintosh: Mr Hepburn emphasises the very point that I am trying to make. Why does the SNP always look at things that it cannot do rather than things that it can do? It can shape the franchise and it can promote social enterprise, community benefit and worker co-operation. All of those things are within its power. It could run a not-for-profit company in relation to the franchise, if it had the political will. We have the political will, and we would join the SNP in supporting that.

Tomorrow evening I hope to join John Wilson and others in the SNP and across the chamber in welcoming and debating Oxfam's report on the economy. Scotland often prides itself on being a more progressive country than the rest of the UK—more altruistic and less selfish in our politics and our voting intentions. Today, I am conscious that David McLetchie would describe that claim as a moot point, but it is an issue that I would like the Government to pursue and explore. Why can we not set an example in pursuing a more ethical economy? If we believe that it is morally right for people and companies to pay their taxes in order to pay for the schools and hospitals that we all need, is there not more that the Scottish Government could do to support that culture of social responsibility? The minister knows how strongly I and my colleagues feel about our handing over millions of pounds to companies such as Amazon. However, rather than excuse or explain how we ended up subsidising that immensely profitable multinational, can we not introduce a set of criteria that favours local small businesses?

Government procurement is not the most radical reforming agenda but, as Alison Johnstone and James Kelly have already pointed out, it could provide an opportunity for the Government to make a statement about the economic values that it holds dear. Why not use it to promote not just small Scottish businesses but good working practices, union recognition or the living wage? People do not want to have dead-end or exploitative jobs and they do not want zero-hours contracts. This Government and this Parliament could do something about that right now.

I was going to make a point about education, but I will move to my conclusion.

I worry that, today, we are debating the platform of a Government with only one objective— independence—and that, in the meantime, Scotland is on hold. If this Government could see beyond the referendum, it would see that the issues that are on people's minds are to do with their jobs and livelihoods and the education and future prospects of their children, not constitutional change. We did not need independence to deliver the smoking ban, to rebuild all our schools or to introduce free personal care and the free bus pass for the elderly. We do not need it to oppose privatisation of the NHS. We did all of those things through devolution, and it is through devolution— through the powers and the political will of this Parliament—that we can build the new, progressive Scotland.

16:34

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am very pleased to have been asked to contribute to this important debate on the Government's programme.

Those members who have had ministerial experience will know that the content of a Government's programme is the culmination of months of hard work. Behind the scenes, many dedicated and committed individuals—whether they be ministers, special advisers or civil servants—have been working away hard. On the document itself, I know from experience that the minister responsible will be feeling some relief that it is finally printed and at the back of the chamber. They, the First Minister and other ministers should also take some satisfaction from still delivering so effectively on behalf of the Scottish people after more than eight years in government. The Government continues to demonstrate that it is an experienced team that works together on behalf of the people of Scotland and always puts Scotland first. It has a record to be proud of and is still driving forward positively to improve the quality of life of our citizens. Most important of all, it has a vision for the future that is about hope, aspiration and taking Scotland forward—a future in which the

people of Scotland will gain from having responsibility for the political and economic direction that the nation takes.

With just over a year to go until the referendum, this debate is not only an opportunity to consider some of the Government's significant proposals in the programme—in particular, I welcome the announcements on the housing bill, the community empowerment and renewal bill and the courts reform bill—it is also a chance for us to have a quick look back at the gains that the Parliament has brought to the people of Scotland since the advent of devolution. Those gains would simply never have been achievable if decisions in those areas had been left to Westminster. I pay tribute to the former Labour and Liberal coalition of the first eight years of devolution, which, as we have already heard other members suggest, ushered in leading legislation on land reform and ensured free care for the elderly in Scotland, for instance. Similar tribute can be paid to the Parliament and an SNP Government that swept away tuition fees, scrapped prescription charges and kept its promises to deliver an extra 1,000 police officers. None of those gains would have been possible had the reins of responsibility remained at Westminster.

There are many more demonstrations of how Scotland is making more appropriate choices for its future as a result of responsibility resting here in Edinburgh. Perhaps the most notable relates to Scotland's national health service, which the First Minister alluded to. Scotland's national health service is what it says on the tin; it is not the fragmented organisation south of the border that is in danger of meltdown as a result of Westminster's flawed policy choices. On health matters, I am also pleased to see the mental health and adults with incapacity bill in the programme. That bill is important to protect vulnerable people.

I am not making these comments to applaud the actions of any one party or any one organisation in the Parliament; I do so for this institution—this place called "Holyrood". I do so for the Parliament of Scotland. Over the years, the direction that Parliament has set for Scotland has served only to deepen my belief about who the best people are to make the decisions about our future. By that, I mean the people who happen to live and work in Scotland. They self-evidently have more invested in Scotland's future and are therefore much more likely to make the appropriate decisions and better choices. The creation of the Parliament has demonstrated beyond doubt that Scotland has gained through having more responsibility in her own hands.

The revenue Scotland and tax powers bill is a historic but small first step, as the First Minister described it. However, it is now time to put

responsibility for the full range of powers in the hands of the people I mentioned.

It is time to give the people of Scotland the opportunity to create new gains and make better choices through setting their own direction, and to give them the opportunity, for instance, to decide for themselves, if they so choose, to say no to a new generation of weapons of mass destruction based on the Clyde. It is time to give Scotland the opportunity to gain hugely from not having to take part in what is no more than a vanity project that is unjustifiable using moral, environmental, strategic or economic arguments.

Unfortunately, however, all unionist parties are now committed to throwing untold billions of pounds at a new generation of nuclear weapons based in Scotland. As the First Minister said earlier, last year the UK Government announced £350 million more of spending on the next stage of Trident renewal. That sum is barely one third of one per cent of the £100 billion of the total lifetime cost of replacing Trident. I cannot understand for the life of me why we are having this argument and why Scotland cannot make its own decision. We have a Government in Westminster committed not only to spending all that money on Trident but to bringing in the bedroom tax and welfare cuts, which are creating much misery in so many of our homes.

The one undeniable fact is that most people and Scottish parliamentarians are opposed to those abhorrent weapons. Irrespective of that, it is Westminster that will decide whether to commit billions of pounds on a project that is not worth the pennies that are spent on it.

The evidence is clear for everyone to see: the only democratic means by which we can halt the madness of siting a new generation of nuclear weapons only a few miles from our largest city, Glasgow, is independence. I hope and I pray that, when we get to September next year, Scotland will deliver that.

16:41

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): There have been times when members could have been forgiven for not realising that we were debating the Scottish Government's legislative programme for 2013-14, although occasionally they may have realised that that was the case.

Most members on the SNP benches do not want to talk about the Government's legislative programme. We listened carefully to the bills that were outlined in minute detail during the First Minister's statement. We on this side of the chamber will happily support some of the bills, we will want to examine and amend some of them and I am sure that we will ultimately reject others.

However, the totality of the programme on offer is relatively thin for a Government with an in-built majority that could make fundamental reforms to a whole range of systems.

Let us focus on some of the details that we have heard about. One of today's big announcements was about automatic early release. That was a case of classic Scottish Government speak. It ignored the fact that the Conservative Party had formal plans to reverse automatic early release, it blamed the former UK Government and the previous Liberal-Labour Scottish Executive for not reversing it, but it conveniently ignored the fact that, for six years in power, it failed to reverse the policy.

We had a statement of fine principle:

"We have now all accepted the need to end the system of automatic early release ... It does not command public confidence."

However, moments later, it was made clear that it will be ended only for some people. We welcome any reversal of automatic early release.

Jamie Hepburn: For the benefit of the record, will Gavin Brown remind us who introduced automatic early release?

Gavin Brown: That has been put on the record a number of times. I have just mentioned it, but I will say it again. It was introduced in 1993 by the Conservative Government, which, in 1997, sought to reverse it.

The reality is that, despite that fine statement of principle, the Scottish Government is only reversing automatic early release for a minority of offenders. The Government needs to explain what percentage of offenders will be dealt with under the proposal and why, if there is such a strong principle—a principle with which we agree—it will apply only to such a small number of offenders.

We heard from the First Minister about the courts reform bill. That is another bill that we will examine in detail. Lord Gill's initial report was a weighty one. An element of that bill—the Cabinet Secretary for Justice may want to respond to this—is that it gives far more work to sheriff courts. We are giving the sheriff courts more work to do tomorrow, but the slight problem is that we shut many sheriff courts yesterday. Perhaps the justice minister will explain how we can give sheriff courts far more work while shutting them at the same time. The First Minister said, in relation to the UK Government, that some people see the price of policies and not their value. That applies equally to the Scottish Government's decision to close down numerous sheriff courts across the country.

We heard the usual hyperbole. The Scottish Government is creating a quango by the name of revenue Scotland—indeed, it already exists—

which will be responsible for the collection of the landfill tax and the land and buildings transaction tax. The Scottish Government says that establishing revenue Scotland is “an historic step”. If setting up a tax quango to pick up two taxes—in fact, it is not even collecting the taxes but overseeing their collection, which is a minor detail—is an historic step, I do not want to see something that is not an historic step.

Perhaps the Government or any SNP member can explain what is happening with the procurement reform bill. We welcomed the proposal when it was announced in 2011 and when it was re-announced in 2012, but I heard nothing about the bill from the Government today, and when I checked this morning it had not been introduced. The bill seems to have been delayed, rather like most of the Scottish Government’s procurement projects, which is ironic.

During the past few years, we have heard numerous bits of new language to describe the consequences of the recession. A zombie debtor is an indebted consumer who is able to pay only the debt interest each month. A zombie company is one that does the bare minimum that is needed if it is to exist as a company. We now have, with the SNP, a zombie Government—a Government that is so focused on the referendum campaign that it does the bare minimum that is needed to exist as a Government. That is what we heard from the Government today.

16:47

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in support of the Government’s programme.

Today marks the beginning of a parliamentary year that will take us to within touching distance of the biggest decision that Scotland will take in 300 years. In next September’s referendum, people in Scotland will be asked to choose between two futures. One is the status quo, whereby the power to determine Scotland’s future will be retained in Westminster and exercised by a Government that Scotland’s voters did not elect and which imposes on Scotland economic and social policies that our people do not support and that harm the weakest and most vulnerable in our society. The bedroom tax, which many members mentioned, is just one example of the unfair and unjust measures that a Westminster Government has imposed on Scotland.

The alternative future, which I believe the people in Scotland will support, is one in which our people are governed from a Scottish Parliament that they elected and which represents their interests. It is a Parliament that since 1999 has demonstrated its ability to deliver policies that

reflect the values of Scottish society, as Bruce Crawford said in his excellent speech. It is a Parliament whose policies underline what has been, to date, a shared commitment to protecting the weak and vulnerable in our society and to creating a dynamic economy that can generate jobs and prosperity for our people. It is a Parliament that adheres to the principle of universality in delivering essential public services that reflect the strong moral and ethical underpinning of our collective approach to the government of Scotland.

Today’s programme for government embodies and reflects those objectives and values. Although we are debating the Government’s programme for the future, it is appropriate to reflect on what this Parliament has achieved with the limited powers that are at its disposal. For example, we introduced the ban on smoking in public places, we retained universal benefits in the form of free personal and nursing care for the elderly, benefiting more than 77,000 older people, we introduced free eye examinations for all and we abolished prescription charges.

In doing all that, this Parliament has delivered a national health service for the people in Scotland that remains free at the point of need and that has not begun—and I hope never will begin—a process that many people think will mean that the NHS south of the border is increasingly driven by the dictates of the marketplace and not patients’ needs or the decisions that are made in general practitioners’ consulting rooms or hospital wards.

It is clear from those examples that people in Scotland benefit the most when decisions about Scotland are taken in Scotland. The programme for government set out today by the First Minister will build on the achievements so far—and nowhere more than in relation to our public health.

This parliamentary year will see the passage of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Bill to permit the integration of health and social care services, which will improve greatly the health and wellbeing of our people and which, along with the prioritisation of preventative spending, demonstrates this Government’s commitment to adhere to the principles set out by the Christie commission in its report on the future of public service delivery. That agenda will be taken forward under the programme for government through legislation to improve the operation and efficiency of mental health legislation for service users and practitioners—the mental health and adults with incapacity bill—which I welcome greatly and which will help to protect our vulnerable, and through provision to establish Scotland’s own food safety and standards body called food standards Scotland, which will help us to address the significant food-related health challenges that

Scotland faces, with consumer protection being paramount.

I am also particularly pleased that, unlike the Westminster Government, the Scottish Government will continue to move forward with its plans to introduce plain packaging for cigarettes and other tobacco products. I firmly believe that to be one of the most important public health measures that can be taken in this country. It is a matter of some regret that the UK Government has decided not to proceed with legislation on that. Our nation's health and wellbeing is one of the most important matters for which this Parliament has legislative responsibility. I believe that it is one in which the Parliament has had a genuinely impressive track record throughout the period since 1999. The measures outlined by the First Minister in the programme for government will build on that track record and demonstrate that this Government and this Parliament can continue to deliver for the people in Scotland.

It remains the case that if this Parliament is to build fully on those successes and be in a position to tackle all the underlying causes of our public health problems, not least the considerable inequality in income that has come to characterise this country under successive Westminster Governments, this Parliament must have access to the full range of economic and social policy powers. That is what independence is all about. It is not about empowering the SNP or this Government; rather, it is about empowering this Parliament to take the decisions and make the policies that are right for the people in Scotland. It is about putting the people first and ensuring that the politicians for whom they vote have the powers that they need to deliver the policies that they want and to create the type of Scotland in which they want to live.

I welcome the Scottish Government's programme and am looking forward to 18 September next year, when we will have the opportunity as a nation to take control of our own destiny and to begin to build a Scotland that reflects our values, our aspirations and our principles.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

I remind members that there is a little bit of time in hand if they wish to take interventions.

16:53

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

Last week, *The Courier* in Dundee reported a 37 per cent rise in shoplifting in our city—people shoplifting food to survive. Meanwhile, food banks in our cities are inundated with hungry people driven to desperation and to bear the indignity of asking for food to feed their families. Last week,

the Trussell Trust, which, sadly, has become familiar to all of us through its food bank operation, reported that the use of food banks has gone up by 120 per cent in my city and by 400 per cent across Scotland.

Rising domestic energy prices, constantly rising food prices and a freeze in wages have made it difficult for some and impossible for others—even those in work—to survive. We all know that for those out of work things are more difficult. Our young people are still struggling desperately to find work. The number of 18 to 24-year-olds claiming jobseekers allowance in Scotland has gone up by 78 per cent in the past year.

The First Minister said this afternoon that our Parliament has demonstrated concern for the most vulnerable people in our society. I contend that this legislative programme does not match that assertion. He listed previous Administrations' achievements as the hallmark of the Parliament's success and then presented us with a thin and uninspiring legislative programme that is supposed to match his bold assertions for our country. It falls woefully short. It does nothing to address the problems that families going through the doors of food banks this afternoon are facing, and it does nothing to address the scandalous waste of young people who are out of work.

Under my new brief, I will shadow the Bankruptcy and Debt Advice (Scotland) Bill. I sincerely hope that the minister, Fergus Ewing, will produce a bill that will help, and not penalise, the financially marginalised in our communities. Less than a year ago in the Justice Committee, I asked John Swinney, the finance secretary, to justify his new fees for bankruptcy. He doubled the bankruptcy fees for people with low incomes and low assets from £100 to £200 despite warnings from Labour and from Citizens Advice Scotland that those people would turn to payday lenders to find their bankruptcy fees. Maybe the finance secretary did not get the acronym and did not realise that LILA stood for low income, low assets. I really hope that the Bankruptcy and Debt Advice (Scotland) Bill will be a bit more progressive.

There is absolutely nothing in the programme for government on the scandal of payday loans in our communities. Perhaps that is not surprising, as Fergus Ewing's views on payday loans are clear. Over the summer, my colleague Kezia Dugdale has been doing a power of work with my Labour colleagues, including Anne McTaggart, in campaigning hard on the issue. However, in a letter to Kezia Dugdale, the minister called payday loans "legal, fair and transparent". I will give him the fact that they are legal, but debt is devolved into his hands and he holds the cards on it: are they fair and transparent? I imagine that Anne McTaggart would tell me that the people to whom

she has spoken in her community have not told her that payday loans are fair and transparent.

Patrick Harvie: That is an issue on which, once again, we should all be able to find some common ground. However, those who are on the no side of the independence debate must acknowledge that, with responsibility for debt but no power to regulate credit, we are in a bind. What is the solution to the problem if we do not have the ability to regulate the provision of credit?

Jenny Marra: Patrick Harvie brings me neatly on to my next point, which is on Labour's asks. Johann Lamont kindly gave us some ideas for how the Scottish Government could fill out its legislative programme. Labour has three key asks on this topic. The first is that the Government use the planning system to say no to payday loan shops in our communities. The second—*[Interruption.]* If members will let me give the ideas—

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): They are back-door solutions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jenny Marra: The second ask is that the Scottish Government set up a loan guarantee fund to help credit unions to offer an alternative, and the third ask is that the Government run a public awareness campaign on the dangers of those loans. Bob Doris calls those ideas back-door solutions, but I call them using the powers that are vested in this Parliament to make a difference to people in our communities now.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: No, thank you.

Johann Lamont gave the First Minister a list of initiatives that Labour would take to make a difference to people's lives now. Iain Gray's bus bill is desperately needed in the communities that I represent, as is Labour's living wage bill and Richard Simpson's nutrition bill, which would prevent ill health before it starts. My bill on human trafficking is designed to use the powers of the Parliament to make Scotland a no-go destination for traffickers.

So much can be done with the powers that we have in this building, and they are not back-door solutions—they are powerful solutions. World-leading experts on trafficking have said that the proposals in our consultation are some of the most radical and progressive in the world, but they are achievable with the powers vested in this Parliament.

This summer, the British Government adopted a private member's bill at Westminster that was very similar to Labour's proposals and committed to

driving it through the House of Commons. I am surprised that the Scottish Government is not taking the same approach, given that other devolved Administrations within the UK are taking the initiative on human trafficking. The Scottish Government is rapidly falling behind on modern-day slavery in our communities. I had hoped that we would see a bill today, but perhaps the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will think again and change his mind.

17:00

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I welcome today's debate and the Government's programme that has been laid before us. I also welcome the First Minister's statement that set out that programme.

I thought that it was interesting to hear Johann Lamont suggest that it is not in the First Minister's interests to state what the Parliament can do. I presume that she was not listening to the First Minister because his statement was entirely imbued with the achievements of the Parliament. Perhaps her rhetoric does not match the reality.

I will focus on a couple of the bills that have been specifically mentioned today. As a member of the Finance Committee, I undertook scrutiny of the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill and the Landfill Tax (Scotland) Bill, which formed the first legislation on taxation that the Parliament has ever considered.

I therefore welcome the proposed new revenue Scotland and tax powers bill, which will establish revenue Scotland as the tax authority that is responsible for Scotland's devolved taxes from 1 April 2015. That is an important first step in taking on greater responsibility for setting and collecting taxes in Scotland. It is entirely unclear to me why Gavin Brown does not think that that is the case—and now that we know that he is not interested in the issue of revenue Scotland, I look forward to him disengaging from any thorough and rigorous assessment of the proposed bill when it comes before the Finance Committee.

Gavin Brown: I will take a very keen interest in the bill, but I thought that describing the setting up of a quango as a historic moment was slight overkill.

Jamie Hepburn: It is all about different opinions, is it not, Mr Brown? The fact that this is the first time that the Scottish Parliament has had the chance to enact legislation on taxation could be described as historic. That is my perspective on the matter.

We know that the proposed bill will include provisions for resolving tax disputes quickly and efficiently, thus providing the public with

confidence in the taxes that we are establishing. Crucially, the bill will include provisions on tax avoidance. Too often we see people trying to avoid paying the taxes that they should pay, so it is important that it is set out in legislation how we avoid that scenario. In the same way as Mr Brown, I look forward to scrutinising the proposed legislation at the Finance Committee.

The Scottish Government is also using the powers of the Parliament for the proposed Scottish welfare fund bill. As the deputy convener of the Welfare Reform Committee, I have a clear interest in that proposed legislation. We know that the Scottish Government has already taken measures to support mitigation of the welfare reforms. Working with COSLA, the Scottish Government has plugged Westminster's £40 million cut to the council tax benefit budget for this year.

Ruth Davidson: This summer, I read that the First Minister was backing a benefit cap. The point had quotation marks around it and it was in the *Sunday Post*. Will the member tell us when the Government will bring in a benefit cap, how much it will be and for which Scots it will be implemented?

Jamie Hepburn: That was an interesting intervention when I was talking about council tax benefit. The point that I was going to make is that 560,000 people in Scotland will not be impacted by the cut from the Westminster Government, which Ms Davidson supports. Professor Steve Fothergill from Sheffield Hallam University told the Welfare Reform Committee that people in Scotland are comparatively better off as a consequence of that move.

We have also seen around £8 million being set aside to support advice agencies, and we have had assurances of the continuity of the payment of passported benefits. Those are important measures that will protect people in Scotland.

The Scottish welfare fund will be another important part of the Scottish Government's work to use the powers of this Parliament to mitigate the effects of welfare reform and to plug the gap caused by the cuts imposed by the UK Government. Christina McKelvie made the point that 20,000 people have already been assisted and that we have the capacity to assist around 200,000 people.

It is extraordinary to hear the Labour Party criticising the proposed new fund. I would have thought that the Labour Party would get behind the fund and support it, but instead we hear criticism of the Scottish Government establishing a Scottish welfare fund.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: I will let you in in a minute, Ms Baillie.

It is particularly peculiar when we see that research by the Children's Society found that funding for local welfare schemes in England has been cut in real terms by £150 million compared with equivalent funding in 2010, which is not a scenario that we have here in Scotland.

Jackie Baillie: Does the member not recognise that it is one thing to have a fund but that if you sit on the money and do not distribute it to those in most need, that is, frankly, extraordinary? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jamie Hepburn: I do not see that as a real characterisation of what is happening on the ground.

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

Jamie Hepburn: I will let you in in a minute, Mr Gray, if you will let me answer Ms Baillie first. I will come to you in a minute, Mr Gray.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please.

Jamie Hepburn: I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer. I will come to Mr Gray in a minute.

We know that the welfare fund is a new fund that has just been established, but people are becoming more aware of it. It would be better for the Labour Party to get behind the fund instead of criticising it.

Iain Gray: Mr Hepburn must remember that we sit together on the Welfare Reform Committee. In that committee, Labour members said the Government's guidelines for the welfare fund would mean that not enough of the money would get out to the people who need it. In the Western Isles, 90 per cent less has been spent than was spent in the same period last year. We are behind the fund, but what we said is right: it needs to be sorted.

Jamie Hepburn: I remind Mr Gray that he is not actually on the Welfare Reform Committee any more, because he has resigned from it. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jamie Hepburn: I also make the point that this is a new fund and that its funds have to be spent over the entirety of the year, so we will look and see what the position is at the end of the year.

We will put the welfare fund on a statutory footing, and I look forward to scrutinising that over the coming period. However, as much as I welcome the measures to mitigate the effects of

the welfare reforms, I think that we can surely aspire to do more. When we see £2 billion per annum cut from benefit payments, with a disproportionate impact on women and on families with children, and a bedroom tax hitting tens of thousands of households that was introduced by a Government that people in Scotland did not vote for, surely we can aspire to do more than just mitigation.

A letter from Mark Hoban MP, the Minister of State for Employment at Westminster, to Glasgow City Council contains the UK Government's apparent explanation for the increased reliance on food banks. I quote directly from the letter:

"The increased emphasis on reducing food waste may well be one of the drivers for the growth in the number of foodbanks and similar initiatives and, consequently, the increased use by companies."

That is through-the-looking-glass stuff. Why are we allowing those people to determine Scotland's welfare system for us?

I welcome what is being done for mitigation, but I think that we can aspire to do more. That is why I welcome part of the on-going Scottish Government work programme in the form of the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill, through which we will have the chance to put power back into the hands of the Scottish people, complete the powers of this Parliament, do more than just mitigate, and create a better society.

17:07

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I have listened very carefully to all the contributions and speeches, but I am still trying to get my head round some of the Opposition's contributions, if they can be called that.

I must say that I take great umbrage at some of the comments that were made. I intended to start my comments in a very positive manner and I will go on to do that. However, I just want to say to the Opposition, particularly Mr Macintosh, that as an SNP back bencher I did not join the SNP for a career as an MSP. I joined because I thought that the best thing for the people of my country was an independent Scotland. I take great umbrage at what Mr Macintosh said about that.

I also wonder where the Opposition members, particularly the Labour members, have been during the summer months. Like many other members, I was out in my constituency talking to people. I know what the people in the Kelvin constituency are thinking and what they want. They want a Government that listens to them, not a Government that talks them down and talks down to them. I put that in as my contribution just now.

James Kelly: When the member was going round the Kelvin constituency, did she come across anybody on housing waiting lists, which are getting longer and are failing to be tackled due to the Government's lack of strategy and its cuts in the housing budget?

Sandra White: I am glad that Mr Kelly raised that particular issue. I certainly did come across many people on a housing waiting list. I also came across some very caring and concerned housing associations that cannot place people because of the bedroom tax and the problems coming from Westminster. That seems to be okay for an Opposition party, while the people of Scotland have to do as they are told. That is why I take great umbrage at the Opposition.

I will make more positive contributions than Opposition members have. I thank the First Minister for his announcements today. He set out a programme for government that was made in the Scottish Parliament for the Scottish people.

I give a positive welcome for the fact that the Scottish Government is still delivering 1,000 extra police officers. We must remember that police numbers in Scotland are unlike those in England and Wales, where police numbers and salaries are falling catastrophically—that is all because of the Winsor report. We must remember that we do not have that problem in Scotland.

I thought that the police figures would be welcomed across the chamber. The Scottish people want a Government and a Parliament that work together for them and welcome positive outcomes, and they want a Parliament that can hold the Government to account when that is required. I do not see a problem with welcoming that. As a back bencher, I uphold that approach and I welcome positive contributions from any member.

There is much to be welcomed in today's statement, such as the community empowerment and renewal bill, which is great. The licensing bill, the housing bill, the ending of automatic early release and many more initiatives are all to be welcomed. It is high time that the Opposition parties put aside their opposition for opposition's sake and worked with the Government to deliver what is best for Scotland and its communities.

Although it is not the only factor, the increase in police numbers has undoubtedly contributed to the lowest level of recorded crime for 37 years. We should all be proud of that. I hope that Opposition members would have the maturity to acknowledge that the legislative programme will go further to reduce crime and make our communities much safer.

Only last week, the Glasgow *Evening Times* ran an excellent article on crime in Glasgow. The

headlines were staggering. Since 2007, the youth crime rate has almost halved and the number of knife assaults has fallen by 40 per cent—by the way, Glasgow City Council's Labour leader has welcomed that. The reduction has been credited in part to the Scottish Government's cashback for communities programme, which £50 million has been put into. We should be proud of that, too. I thank all the people and organisations who have been involved in that not only for making their communities safer but—this is important—for empowering people in those communities to realise their potential. We should look towards that.

I have long championed the community empowerment and renewal bill. I echo Alison Johnstone's comments; the bill has fantastic potential and I will follow its progress with great interest.

Like Mark McDonald, I welcome the licensing bill and in particular a new licensing system for airguns. It is a pity that Johann Lamont, the Labour Party leader, did not even have the decency to mention that important bill.

I also welcome the inclusion in the licensing bill of a provision to give communities the power to regulate adult entertainment. Some members might recall that I previously tried to introduce a similar provision but, unfortunately, Opposition parties did not support it and voted it down. Perhaps they will support the legislation this time. That is all that I will say on that.

Margo MacDonald: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, Margo—I do not have time.

The Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill, which is working its way through Parliament, puts victims at the heart of the justice system. I look forward to scrutinising it at further stages.

As I have said, there are many things to be proud of. We have heard from everyone about what the Parliament can do with the powers that it has and about the successes that it has achieved so far. We have heard from some members about successes that can be achieved in the future, which can only be a good thing.

However, I am keenly aware of the areas of our lives that we have no control over and about which decisions are being taken at Westminster by a Government that is neither representative of nor interested in Scotland's needs. It might come as a wee bit of a surprise to some Opposition members to realise that the Scottish people out there on the doorsteps are also aware of that. The decisions at Westminster are causing further inequality and further hardships for ordinary working folk and they are pushing thousands into poverty.

Westminster legislation is doing that—that is the reality of our not having the full powers of a normal Parliament.

I hope and believe that most of us in the Parliament want a fairer and more equal society. The debate serves as a reminder that to achieve that—we probably differ on this point—there is only one way forward, which is for all the decisions that affect Scotland and the people of Scotland to be taken here in Scotland. The only way to achieve that is through a yes vote next September.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair and to use full names when referring to other members.

17:15

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I find this rather a difficult speech to make: I had thought that I would be able to say something about a wide range of bills, but I find that there is not a great deal to say. I think that Alex Salmond, the First Minister, found exactly the same difficulty in his speech, because in 14 years I have never heard a legislative programme speech by a First Minister that devoted so little time to the bills. I am sure that somebody will go away and analyse all 15 of those speeches, but I would be prepared to guess—and even to put on a bet—that his speech today had the lowest proportion of any of those speeches of time spent actually dealing with the bills themselves. Of course, the reason for that is absolutely simple: it was a speech about the referendum and a legislative programme about the referendum, from a Government that has transformed itself into a campaign.

The programme has been driven by two principles. First, do not rock the boat—if you want to win as many votes as possible in the referendum, you clearly want to annoy as few people as possible in the next 12 months. Secondly, the whole underlying theme of the First Minister's speech was an attempt to demonstrate what Scotland cannot do rather than what it can. It certainly was not one of Nicola Sturgeon's finer moments when she said on the radio this morning that the programme was radical and that it was a programme for economic growth.

Being a fair-minded person, I will comment briefly on some bills that are interesting and potentially good. I think that everyone who has spoken has mentioned as a first choice the community empowerment and renewal bill, so let us hope that we can make something radical of that. I am not sure whether it is radical in its current form. We debated the consultation paper in Parliament one year ago this month, and people

can look up the issues that were raised then. The proposed bill builds, belatedly, on our own historic community right to buy. I hope that that will be extended to urban areas and will become meaningful, because at the moment councils often say that they cannot take an interest in a community group that wants land because that would be against European state aid rules. That issue must be confronted head on.

I also rather like the revenue Scotland and tax powers bill, but I gently remind the Administration that it springs directly from the Scotland Act 2012. It is important to me because I want to build on the fiscal powers that we already have to create enhanced devolution, so I think that that is a significant bill.

The housing bill is interesting and I have no objection to the abolition of the right to buy. However, if the First Minister really thinks that that will make housing available to all, as he seemed to suggest, I must tell him that the bill is really marginal in that regard. It is investment in new housing that is crucial.

Finally, of course I welcome the mental health and adults with incapacity amendment bill, which springs from the McManus review of four years ago and builds on our own historic Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, which is another jewel in the crown of devolution.

Near the beginning of his speech, the First Minister emphasised how the Scottish Parliament had demonstrated concern for the most vulnerable in society, although I do not think that free personal care is necessarily the best example of that. The question for us today is: what have we got for the most vulnerable in society in this programme? Where is the serious drive against health inequalities? Where is the action on payday loans or the living wage? What about legislation on human trafficking? We should thank Jenny Marra for filling that gap with her bill.

Where are the further measures against the continuing scourge of domestic abuse, which, for understandable reasons, is very much to the forefront of the Parliament's and the public's mind today? We all know what we think in Parliament about one particular individual, but let us not forget the progress that has been made and the further action that is required. There is a courts reform bill that will come before the Parliament, to address other issues to do with the Court of Session and so on, but we all saw the story in *The Herald* last week about the way in which the great domestic abuse court in Glasgow is now running into difficulties, so let us address that problem. Although I welcome the setting up of a domestic abuse court in Edinburgh, I was discussing with Alison Johnstone a moment ago the fact that that court serves only sections of Edinburgh and not

the whole of Edinburgh. Why do not we address those issues, which relate to the protection of victims of domestic abuse?

We also need to look at some of the provisions in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. Scottish Women's Aid has put in a long submission that highlights concerns about some of the effects of that legislation on victims. As well as taking action on the member who should not be a member of this Parliament, let us drive forward at the same time and build on the great work that we have done on the issue over the past 14 years.

Finally, where is there anything about the bedroom tax, except rhetoric against laws from London? It is the classic example—the best example of all—that emphasises what we cannot do and forgets what we can do.

Mark McDonald: Surely Malcolm Chisholm will recognise that, alongside the bedroom tax, there are a range of other welfare reforms that are impacting on his constituents and mine. The simple fact is that, within the fixed budget of the Scottish Government, to select the bedroom tax above other parts of the welfare reform agenda would lead to pressure to move resources to other elements of welfare reform. Would it not be better if we took those decisions here, in this chamber, rather than picking and choosing which welfare reforms we mitigate and which we do not?

Malcolm Chisholm: That was a very nice try to deflect us from the issue of the bedroom tax, but the simple fact of the matter is that it is the Scottish Government and the SNP who relentlessly use the bedroom tax as, I would say, almost the number one piece of ammunition against the UK Government. They forget what they could do, as a Scottish Government, to mitigate the effects of that tax. Fortunately, Labour has not forgotten, as Iain Gray made clear yesterday, and I hope that we will hear more about that in due course.

17:21

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I welcome the programme for government, which tackles vital and urgent matters. I remind members that a number of other bills are already in train that do the same. I am glad to serve on the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee, which is considering one of the bills that can bring about major changes in Scotland—one that can allow us to have the powers that we do not have at present.

I will concentrate on the questions that affect rural Scotland, which will face the same choice as the rest of the nation next September. With a no vote, we face a future where we are without the powers to transform Scotland, where we will be

unable to represent our vital farming, fishing and food interests in Europe, and where the needs of Scotland are seldom the UK Government's priority. My committee—the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee—heard the UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs rub that in when we heard from him last June. With a yes vote, however, we will have the normal powers and responsibilities of an independent nation and a seat at the top table to defend our rural interests.

Rural Scotland will welcome the programme for government. With the food standards (Scotland) bill, we, unlike Westminster, will ensure that the vital functions of the Food Standards Agency remain together to ensure that its primary function is consumer protection. Given the horse meat scare, it is all the more important to protect the reputation of Scotland's booming food and drink industry. The community empowerment and renewal bill can increase participation in decision taking and in the design and delivery of services in local areas; it can also enable public assets to be taken over for local uses through the community right to buy. I have believed in that for many years, and I believe that it can be achieved by this Government.

Underpinning that, in a tax, financial and fiscal sense, are the revenue Scotland and tax powers bill and the tax management bill, which create the possibility of a distinctive structure and framework that will apply to all devolved taxes but also, potentially, to more taxes when Scotland demands them—and with independence, it will certainly demand many more. I will give an example of why that is needed. Land reform needs those tax powers and a lot more. Before devolution, the House of Lords in the Westminster Parliament could block the abolition of the feudal system. People recognised that then. Since 1999, Holyrood has abolished the feudal system, codified access laws and reformed crofting and some aspects of tenant farming, but not as much as we would like.

This summer, James Hunter and others pointed out in a briefing paper for the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee something that highlights the most concentrated pattern of land ownership in Europe: 432 people own half the private land in Scotland. The briefing says:

“Adept at maximising flows of public money to their estates, landowners have been equally skilled at minimising the flow of cash in the other direction—helped greatly in this regard by successive”—

I would add Westminster—

“Governments’ toleration of a series of arrangements intended to reduce greatly, or even eliminate, effective taxation of landed wealth.

Those arrangements include:

- The various inheritance and capital gains tax reliefs and allowances available to landowners;
- The vesting of ownership in companies, foundations and other entities whose beneficiaries are obscured and concealed;
- The registration of such entities in offshore tax havens such as Grand Cayman, the British Virgin Islands, Panama and Guernsey;”

Those are all reserved matters. We cannot effect radical land reform until we have the powers to do so, and there is no chance in 100 years that Tory, Liberal or Labour Governments—and certainly not if the UK Independence Party is in any future coalitions—will make such a move.

The briefing goes on to say—and justify this—

“Although there is beginning to be anger in some quarters about such largesse (much of it directed at people of great wealth) at a time of unprecedented stringency in other areas of public spending, those arrangements have attracted surprisingly little scrutiny”

in Westminster

“and accordingly merit investigation by”

the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Iain Gray: Like Rob Gibson, I am no great supporter of tax havens. That is why I was a bit puzzled to see, early in the summer, his First Minister making a speech that seemed to imply that Scotland should be a tax haven like Guernsey and the Channel Islands.

Rob Gibson: That is very much a diversion from the facts that we face in this legislative programme.

Labour, in April, promised radical land reform, but not one piece of flesh has been put on the bones of that promise, either since then or today. Even the Lib Dems are set to discuss land reform at their autumn conference. No doubt they will summon up the Gladstonian spirit and promise more half-measures.

The Scottish Affairs Committee can investigate anything it likes, but only independence can deliver the gains of land reform to the Scottish economy, the environment and society. This year's work by the Scottish Government in the land reform review group, which is part of the programme for government, will lay the proposals for taking those radical steps next year.

During this session, the Scottish Government will tackle issues of concern in rural Scotland—I have outlined some of them. Devolution has to be a step along the way, as we have seen. However, in relation to all the issues in the programme for government that I have outlined, we need the full powers of independence to ensure a fairer and more successful Scotland. We need to make sure that we get better than devolution because

devolution is a limited offer that is not up to Scotland's needs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Margo MacDonald, who has a very generous six minutes, to be followed by Kenny MacAskill.

17:28

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): Six minutes! Thank you so much, Presiding Officer. Where will I start?

First, let me put a few people right on a few things. Johann Lamont should remember that it was not because Labour got gubbed and had to find a way of coming back to some prominence and some usefulness in Scotland that we started with devolution. Some of us have wanted devolution and then transfer of power to Scotland for 40 years. Along the way, we have managed to join in and help with the UCS campaign, the housing campaigns and any number of other campaigns that I could mention.

I have the battle scars from those campaigns too, because for me they are indivisible from the means that we are trying to find to best govern ourselves. We have to look at the totality. There must be an awful lot of members in the chamber with fairies living at the bottom of their garden if they thought that they could get through this year and completely separate the Government's programme from the principle that we have to decide. That is why I would not have done it the way that Alex Salmond did it—I told him that a while ago, but we are where we are.

The Government's programme looks thin in places, but it shows potential in other places. Folk such as those on the front benches, who have come up with some pretty good ideas during today's debate, could use that potential to ensure that those ideas get into the legislative programme. The Government should be magnanimous enough to say, "That's a good idea."

I thought that the no campaign figured far too large in much of what has been said by members on the other side of the chamber. From what I have heard, some members just seem to parrot what Scotland could not do. They say that we need broad shoulders so that we can make the same mistakes as have been made by London—no, we could do that with shoulders like sauce bottles. James Kelly complained about civil servants working for the Scottish Government to produce ideas for the white paper. What does he say about half of Whitehall being tied up finding things for the other side?

Before I come on to what I wanted to talk about, I want to say how much I agreed with the Tories

on the issue of corroboration. I think that we need to hold on to the requirement for corroboration, which is one of the jewels of the Scottish system. Perhaps we should also consider whether, instead of "guilty" or "not guilty", the verdict should be "proved" or "not proved". That would also take care of the third verdict.

My colleague Alison Johnstone, who talked about the lack of attention to physical activity in the Government's programme, spoke the truth. She, too, could do a great deal, because she has loads of good ideas on how to get communities involved in promoting physical activity.

I make no apologies for saying that the white paper will be the most important paper ever to come before this Parliament. Therefore, I think that we are entitled to look at it in a somewhat different light. For that reason, the Government must understand that, although white papers usually signal a Government's intention as regards implementing its policies, this white paper must be better than that. The white paper will need to hold out the various options that the Scots might choose in several different policy areas.

For example, the First Minister has said—I have often heard him say it—that we will be a monarchy, but I think, "Mebbes aye and mebbes no." That is a decision that should be taken by the Scots individually. What sort of head of state do they want? Do they want a monarchy? Do they want the monarchy that they have got? Do they want a president? Do they want a senate? Do they want to choose someone from the senate? Do they want a head of state at all? Those are options—all of them legitimate—and I think that the white paper should encompass them.

I have talked about the monarchy, so let me now talk about the difficult things. We will need to control our borders. We will need to determine who comes into and out of Scotland, and we should be quite blunt about that. We are very stupid if we say otherwise, because south of our border there is going to be a huge debate about how population is controlled. Any country has the right to say who comes to live within its boundaries, how many people should be able to come in any one year and so on. We can do that without being racist and without being exclusive. We should be honest about it, but everyone is beginning to duck out in case they are labelled extremist and racist.

Those are a couple of the things that we might look at and consider how they should be presented in the white paper. The white paper should be not merely about the Government's position. The Government can say which option it prefers or advises, but it should also say what the choices are. People have been asking for information—that is what folk on the other side of

the chamber do not seem to realise. A look at any opinion poll shows that the majority of folk are saying, "I do not know enough about this." Well, the way to find out about it is to look at the normal business of government and to hold that up against the options for change that are being suggested.

The Labour Party says that it is suggesting options for change, too. Labour should not be a stick in the mud about it: let us see them and let us hear them. Labour could roll out a white paper as well. The Labour Party is supposed to want maximalist devolution—fine, let us see that in a paper. I am not in any way afraid of that, because I think that the Scots will realise that, if they vote no, on the day after that, the whole place will realise what a wound it has inflicted on the body of Scotland. They will not do that. We have come too far for us to stall or turn back. That is why I think that, at the end of the day, the Scots will vote yes. They will be full of doubts and complaints and there will be terrific jokes against ourselves, because that is us, but I think that we will vote to move on, because if we vote to stick in the same place, we will be a laughing stock. In the Parliament in London, they will say that we are all mouth and no kilts.

Those of us who lived through the 1979 referendum can visualise that. That referendum had a much smaller goal, but people realised what they had done to themselves in the time immediately following it. It took us a wee while to lift up politics in Scotland—that did not happen until the UCS came along and that sort of heart came back into Scotland. We cannot afford to do that.

Right now, extra revenue is available to any Scottish treasury and we should use that money productively. I do not care that people say that we could not possibly have enough money coming in to fund the things that we want. Who is kidding who? Why are they trying to hold on to us?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you conclude, please?

Margo MacDonald: Oh yes—I was just noticing the time, Presiding Officer.

I ask the Government to take on board what I have said about the breadth of the white paper.

17:36

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government is committed to helping to create a fairer and safer Scotland for all our people. We will continue our distinctive and highly effective approach to justice, which is focused on doing the right thing for the people of Scotland and putting their interests and,

as members have mentioned, values first. That approach has, for example, led to our policy of ensuring that we have 1,000 extra police officers keeping our communities safe—a matter that was again confirmed today. That policy is bearing fruit and the results are clear. As the First Minister mentioned, recorded crime is at a 39-year low. Further, knife crime is down by 60 per cent since we took office in 2007 and violent crime is down by one fifth in the past year alone and by nearly half since we came to office.

All that is in a climate in which Westminster budget cuts continue to create massive financial challenges across the justice sector, as is the case in every sector. However, we are focused on continuing to make Scotland's communities safer, which is why we have today announced the end of automatic early release for dangerous prisoners. Automatic early release was introduced by the then UK Conservative Government in 1993. It remained unaltered throughout the period of devolved Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition Government, and this SNP Administration will end it. We are taking action to make Scotland safer.

Gavin Brown: The cabinet secretary used the expression "dangerous prisoners". Can he give the Parliament absolute clarity on to whom the measure will apply? So that we have clarity, will he say exactly which criminals and what length of sentences will be involved?

Kenny MacAskill: We are making it clear that the measure will apply to dangerous prisoners who would cause harm, which obviously includes those who perpetrate violent offences. Clearly, the period is 10 years, which would encapsulate offences such as culpable homicide and other serious matters. As a matter of interest, given some of the points that Mr Brown made earlier, I do not know whether he knows that 10 years is the period that was introduced south of the border under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

Chris Grayling has effected that and set that date. We are targeting serious, dangerous offenders who would cause harm in our communities. It is essential that we ensure that we have the power to keep them in for the period that is necessary for their sentences and allow them to be released only if the body that is charged with looking after the interests of the public—namely, the Parole Board for Scotland—is satisfied.

Gavin Brown: What about serious, dangerous criminals who would do us harm and are sentenced for shorter periods?

Kenny MacAskill: As the First Minister kindly helped me out by saying, the proposal also relates to those who commit a sexual offence because we realise the consequences of such offences. For

them, the tariff is set at four years. Given that Mr Brown and his colleagues have been calling for the abolition of automatic early release, I hope that they will now welcome the action that the Government is taking.

We will address automatic early release for dangerous offenders, such as violent offenders who are sentenced to 10 years or more and sexual offenders who are sentenced to four years or more in prison. The Parole Board for Scotland will be empowered to consider risks to the public for those prisoners. If a prisoner poses an unacceptable risk to the public, that prisoner will stay in prison and serve their entire sentence.

We will introduce amendments to our Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. If they are approved by Parliament—I hope they will be approved unanimously—that will provide the protection that the public seek and to which they are entitled.

Parliament is already considering important reforms through the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, including corroborated evidence no longer routinely being required. The Lord Justice Clerk has said that quality, not quantity, of evidence is necessary. We are clear that strong cases—cases that could be taken forward under other countries' systems—should not be denied a hearing under our system because of the requirement for corroboration.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary is aware, I have huge concerns about the abolition of corroboration. I maintain that position and ask him to consider the position of many of us in the Parliament—perhaps even among SNP members—with regard to considering corroboration in the context of reviewing the position on the not proven, proven and guilty verdicts, rather than taking it on its own.

Kenny MacAskill: We have taken on board the understandable concerns that some people have, which is why we are increasing the majority that is necessary for a guilty verdict and why we are taking on board views that we received when we asked for safeguards for the recommendations given by our most senior judges. However, the reform is also about providing a voice for those who have suffered in silence—often vulnerable men, women and children who have experienced abuse behind closed doors, where there are no eyewitnesses.

In addition to the existing bills, three new justice bills will be introduced in the year ahead. That builds upon what we are already doing in the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill, as Ms Grahame will know. Our courts reform bill will take forward the recommendations of Scotland's most senior judge, Lord Gill, who was appointed by my

predecessors to make recommendations to help to improve the public's access to justice and to provide a court system fit for the 21st century. The damages bill and licensing bill will also improve matters in those areas and provide necessary changes.

We will also have a conclusion of contracts bill, which will be a candidate for the new parliamentary procedures.

Those bills will make Scotland safer and stronger. We have delivered record police numbers and a 39-year low in recorded crime. We are now ending what the public have regarded as an injustice for far too long: automatic early release.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The debate on the Scottish Government's programme for government 2013-14 will continue tomorrow afternoon.

Business Motions

17:44

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-07528, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 6 December 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-07529, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 2 timetable for the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 22 November 2013.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:45

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-07530, on committee membership; motion S4M-07568, on substitution on committees; and motion S4M-07531, on the office of the clerk.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Hanzala Malik be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee;

Jayne Baxter be appointed to replace Neil Findlay as a member of the Education and Culture Committee;

Margaret McCulloch be appointed to replace Mary Fee as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Drew Smith as a member of the Health and Sport Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as a member of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Elaine Murray as a member of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Elaine Murray be appointed to replace Jenny Marra as a member of the Justice Committee;

John Pentland be appointed to replace Graeme Pearson as a member of the Justice Committee;

Richard Baker be appointed to replace John Pentland as a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee;

Hugh Henry be appointed to replace Iain Gray as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Ken Macintosh be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Lewis Macdonald be appointed to replace Patricia Ferguson as a member of the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee;

Drew Smith be appointed to replace James Kelly as a member of the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee;

Margaret McDougall be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee;

Margaret McCulloch be appointed to replace Hanzala Malik as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Richard Baker be appointed to replace John Pentland as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee; and

Ken Macintosh be appointed to replace Iain Gray as a member of the Welfare Reform Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Kezia Dugdale be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Education and Culture Committee;

Patricia Ferguson be appointed to replace Neil Findlay as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the European and External Relations Committee;

Jackie Baillie be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Iain Gray be appointed to replace Mary Fee as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance Committee;

Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Jayne Baxter as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Health and Sport Committee;

James Kelly be appointed to replace Graeme Pearson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Graeme Pearson be appointed to replace Margaret McDougall as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Justice Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Richard Simpson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee;

John Pentland be appointed to replace Neil Bibby as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee; and

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that, between 5 January 2014 and 31 January 2015, the Office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 18 and 21 April 2014, 5 May 2014, 23 May and 26 May 2014, St Andrew's Day (28 November 2014), 24 December (pm), 25 and 26 December 2014 and 1 and 2 January 2015.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:45

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S4M-07499, in the name of Ruth Davidson, a motion of condolence, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament expresses its deep regret and sadness at the death of David McLetchie CBE MSP; offers its sympathy and condolences to David's family and friends; recognises the high regard in which he was held by so many colleagues; appreciates his significant contribution to civic life through his legal career, and acknowledges his distinguished record of service, both in this Parliament and to his constituents in the Lothians.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-07530, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Hanzala Malik be appointed to replace Rhoda Grant as a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee;

Jayne Baxter be appointed to replace Neil Findlay as a member of the Education and Culture Committee;

Margaret McCulloch be appointed to replace Mary Fee as a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Drew Smith as a member of the Health and Sport Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as a member of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Elaine Murray as a member of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Elaine Murray be appointed to replace Jenny Marra as a member of the Justice Committee;

John Pentland be appointed to replace Graeme Pearson as a member of the Justice Committee;

Richard Baker be appointed to replace John Pentland as a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee;

Hugh Henry be appointed to replace Iain Gray as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Ken Macintosh be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Lewis Macdonald be appointed to replace Patricia Ferguson as a member of the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee;

Drew Smith be appointed to replace James Kelly as a member of the Referendum (Scotland) Bill Committee;

Margaret McDougall be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee;

Margaret McCulloch be appointed to replace Hanzala Malik as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Richard Baker be appointed to replace John Pentland as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee; and

Ken Macintosh be appointed to replace Iain Gray as a member of the Welfare Reform Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-07568, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Kezia Dugdale be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Education and Culture Committee;

Patricia Ferguson be appointed to replace Neil Findlay as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the European and External Relations Committee;

Jackie Baillie be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Equal Opportunities Committee;

Iain Gray be appointed to replace Mary Fee as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Finance Committee;

Malcolm Chisholm be appointed to replace Jayne Baxter as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Health and Sport Committee;

James Kelly be appointed to replace Graeme Pearson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee;

Graeme Pearson be appointed to replace Margaret McDougall as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Justice Committee;

Sarah Boyack be appointed to replace Richard Simpson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee;

John Pentland be appointed to replace Neil Bibby as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace Malcolm Chisholm as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Petitions Committee; and

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Margaret McCulloch as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-07531, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the office of the clerk, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, between 5 January 2014 and 31 January 2015, the Office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 18 and 21 April 2014, 5 May 2014, 23 May and 26 May 2014, St Andrew's Day (28 November 2014), 24 December (pm), 25 and 26 December 2014 and 1 and 2 January 2015.

Dalbeattie High School (Da Vinci Challenge)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-07061, in the name of Alex Fergusson, on the da Vinci challenge, to be tackled by Dalbeattie high school.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that the Da Vinci Challenge will be held in Milan from 2 to 4 October 2013; acknowledges that this is the first time since its inception in 2005 that the challenge will be held outside Australia; understands that it comprises a mental and educational decathlon that places particular emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, problem solving and creativity; notes that students will work in teams and aim to complete a range of tasks that encompass engineering, mathematics, philosophy, codebreaking, cartography, art and poetry, science, English and creativity; commends Dalbeattie High School, which will send the only team from Scotland to take on the challenge, and wishes the pupils, parents, staff and everyone involved in what it sees as this exciting initiative every possible success as the team prepares for what it considers a truly daunting international competition.

17:47

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): In 2001, a teacher at Knox grammar school in Sydney, Australia, co-ordinated a series of three events, held over three consecutive days, that were collectively designed to provide a wide range of mentally stimulating challenges to teams of pupils from schools in New South Wales. It proved to be an extremely popular concept, to the extent that, in 2004, schools from several states were invited to take part in the inaugural national da Vinci decathlon. Gradually, the competition became so popular that each state now runs its own annual contest, with the winners and host schools of each state being invited to take part in the national decathlon, which is still held at Knox grammar over a three-day period every year.

Clearly, the concept was one in which interest was bound to spread and, with further interest being shown from overseas, 2012 saw the inaugural international da Vinci decathlon, tested on the host schools in Australia, run simultaneously in several countries with links via Skype. Further, just as the original concept started in one state and expanded across a nation, the international concept of the challenge will take a huge leap forward this year when the first international da Vinci decathlon takes place in Milan, Italy, on 2, 3 and 4 October.

Leonardo da Vinci was, of course, one of the world's great thinkers and scholars and, back in the 15th century, it was he who identified a cerebral interconnection between the arts,

anatomy, architecture, engineering and mathematics and astronomy, and the challenges of the decathlon that has been named after him are designed to bring the concept of that interconnection to life in a way that is relevant to us in the 21st century.

The competition therefore places particular emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, problem solving and creativity, and it does so by setting each participating team a series of 10 tasks, which encompass art and poetry, cartography, code-breaking, creative producers, English, engineering, mathematics and chess, philosophy, science and general knowledge. To me, the whole thing sounds every bit as exciting as it does challenging, and I am sure that none of us would want to do anything other than encourage the further development of that great initiative. However, had it not been for the eagle-eyed observation of a young teacher at Dalbeattie high school in Dumfries and Galloway, I would certainly never have heard of the competition, and I suspect that many of the rest of us would never have heard of it either.

A couple of years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting Dalbeattie high school at the invitation of that teacher—Mr Butler—to present the prizes at the end of a day of thought-provoking challenges that he had put together for the pupils, every one of whom had obviously been enthused and motivated by the tasks that had been set. It was clearly Mr Butler's penchant for that type of activity that drew him to the da Vinci decathlon. Completely undaunted at the thought of having to raise at least £7,000 in the last four months—never mind dealing with the logistics of getting a team of 10 pupils and accompanying adults to and from Milan in October—the team from Dalbeattie high was duly entered for the decathlon and it is, I am told, the only school from the whole of Europe that is taking part in the competition. I thought that it was just the only school from the UK. It is also the only state school that will take part. It will take on teams from Australia, the USA, India and South Africa.

One of the reasons why I wanted to bring the debate to the Parliament was simply to emphasise that that type of event does not involve just the individual participating school. Over the summer, the whole town of Dalbeattie witnessed a series of events and activities that involved, absorbed and intrigued the entire community. Over £8,000—not just £7,000—has been raised, and I believe that a final fundraising quiz night is to come this Thursday. Some £2,500 has been raised through grants; the rest has come through a wide variety of activities, such as packing bags in a local supermarket, a weekly sale of cakes made by the pupils—they make good cakes in Dalbeattie; that alone has raised £350—a coffee morning, work in

local charity shops, quiz sheets, individual donations and so on. It surely says everything about our local communities that, even in these most difficult of times, they will dig deep into their pockets for a cause that they believe in. That also says a huge amount about the benefits of education beyond the classroom, the benefits of teamwork, the stimulus of competition and the unforgettable experience and benefit of social interaction between people of different nationalities and cultures.

I have no doubt at all that those benefits will be heaped in abundance on the intrepid team of secondary 2, 3 and 4 pupils who will shortly leave the safe shores of Dumfries and Galloway to take on the world in Milan, and I am quite certain that—win, lose or draw—they will be different people simply as a result of having undergone the experience. I hope and feel certain that they will enthuse future generations of Dalbeattie's pupils to follow in their footsteps; indeed, I would love to think that they will enthuse other Scottish, British and European schools to organise their own decathlons. Who knows? Perhaps it will not be long before Dalbeattie plays host to the international da Vinci challenge.

That is very much for the future, of course. For now, I simply offer the good wishes of all members to the team and its supporting adults who, I am delighted to say, have been able to join us in the gallery.

I am truly delighted to have put the motion to members.

17:53

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Alex Fergusson on bringing a fantastic challenge to the chamber and thereby securing the Parliament's recognition of Dalbeattie high school students and staff for taking part in that unique challenge, in which they will represent Scotland in a competition of truly international proportions. I am also delighted that students from Dalbeattie have made it to the Parliament and are here to listen to the debate. I join Alex Fergusson in welcoming them to the chamber.

I am sure that most of us will not have heard much about the da Vinci decathlon before, because it originated in Australia and made its way to Dalbeattie through an exchange programme, as Alex Fergusson said. That seems to have been one of those fortunate coincidences that has opened up a new opportunity for students.

In starting to find out a bit more about the da Vinci decathlon, one of the things that struck me was the sheer breadth of knowledge and skill that it requires competitors to demonstrate.

As Alex Fergusson mentioned, each team of eight students must complete tasks in art and poetry, cartography, code breaking, English, engineering, mathematics and chess, philosophy, science and general knowledge, as well as being tested on whether they are creative producers. That list is more than a little daunting. Every team member has to play a part in each task, so they all require a good working knowledge of all the subjects. To my mind, that makes the challenge all the more difficult. I am not entirely sure how many of us would necessarily excel if faced with such a task list. That underlines my admiration for the school: not only is it prepared to try something new, but its students will, in effect, be representing the whole of Scotland in October.

This is not just a good competition in its own right. In adopting the da Vinci decathlon, Dalbeattie high school has found an intellectual competition and an ethos that fits well with our curriculum for excellence and the future direction of Scottish education. After all, curriculum for excellence has at its core the promotion of a broad general education and interdisciplinary learning and it instils in our young people the transferable skills that they are likely to need in a world in which many people switch careers regularly and the job for life has become increasingly rare.

The idea that people should be familiar with a wide variety of knowledge is perfectly captured by the event's title. Naming any academic event after Leonardo da Vinci—the original Renaissance man and probably the greatest polymath in history—is ambitious to say the least. The ambition that that represents is very much in line with our aspirations to have an education system that is internationally respected.

The da Vinci decathlon is something that other Scottish schools should consider for the future. I applaud Dalbeattie high school for being the first to try it, but it is a competition and the more competitors there are the better.

I hope to visit Dalbeattie high school soon. I am sorry that I have not got there sooner because I know that the da Vinci challenge is not the only exciting initiative that the school is working on. When I do so, I very much hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will join me.

I join everyone in congratulating Sue Bain and Piers Butler at Dalbeattie high school for taking on the decathlon challenge. Most of all, I wish the very best of luck to the high school students who will be taking part in October in Milan. We are all rooting for them.

17:57

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate Alex Fergusson on securing today's debate. I am pleased to hear that Dalbeattie high school will be involved in such an exciting challenge and wish them all the best with their endeavours. I, too, welcome our guests to the Scottish Parliament.

I take this opportunity to mention the different learning styles that are available to not only children and young people, but adults living in communities across Scotland. Given my background and my degree qualification in community education, I will highlight the roles that community learning and development play in complementing the formal education sector through a community development approach.

I set the scene by referring to the historical context and the origins and development of the formal education sector in Scotland. The formal school sector has long enjoyed an international reputation as part of one of the best educated societies in the world. That tradition is being advanced by Dalbeattie high school's participation in the da Vinci challenge.

The Education Act 1696, which was an act of the Parliament of Scotland, saw the establishment and development of schools that were open to all boys and girls, regardless of their status. It was not until the Education (Scotland) Act 1872 that schooling was made compulsory for children aged five to 13 years of age, which laid the basis of the modern education system. Why the history lesson? The openness of the education system in Scotland and the quality of provision have been the subjects of much myth making.

Alex Fergusson's motion shows what young people in Scotland can achieve if they are given the right support. In April, in my region, Glasgow City Council's education service established the employability and skills partnership team, which helps young people in the city to access vocational education while they are at school.

The introduction of comprehensive education, in legislation in 1965, improved access to education. An attempt was made to provide an adequate standard for all children in Scotland.

Community learning and development can play a key role in not only complementing but supplementing the formal education sector. It is a way of working to support communities to increase the skills, confidence, networks and resources that they need if they are to tackle problems and grasp opportunities. In short, it is a distinct sector of education, alongside school and further and higher education.

The application of the community development approach to the creation of learning opportunities can support: the identification of the local population's educational needs; the planning of provision to meet and support those needs; the promotion of alternative programmes; and the monitoring and evaluation of the planned programmes. Those four points are taken from a paper that Ted Milburn—a former lecturer of mine, who became a professor of community education—delivered some 26 years ago.

What Ted Milburn said more than a quarter of a century ago is more than relevant today. The community learning and development approach is important, not just in its ability to complement and supplement the formal education sector but as a way of taking forward social and economic initiatives, to tackle the poverty and social deprivation that are, unfortunately, still prevalent in too many communities in Scotland.

We therefore need to share examples of good practice, such as the vocational training programme that Glasgow City Council is running and the initiative at Dalbeattie high school. We wish the pupils of Dalbeattie high school well in their endeavours; I hope that they will come back and tell us that they are champions.

18:02

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Alex Fergusson on securing the debate, and I congratulate the staff and pupils of Dalbeattie high school, who are off on an exciting adventure. Good luck to you all.

I had heard of the da Vinci decathlon from a former pupil of mine who is out in Australia on a gap year, but I did not know much of the detail until I was prompted by the debate and the initiative that the school has shown to find out more.

Leonardo da Vinci said that the

"Principles for the Development of a Complete Mind"

are to

"Study the science of art. Study the art of science. Develop your senses ... learn how to see. Realise that everything connects to everything else."

He was, of course, one of the world's great polymaths: a painter, sculptor, architect, musician, engineer, inventor, writer, cartographer—the list goes on. He was an all-round genius because he understood the world's interconnections in their most complex detail. He was a true renaissance man. He might even have been the first proponent of the curriculum for excellence. Who knows?

Probably the most attractive aspect of Leonardo da Vinci's life was his ever-present quest for

knowledge and for a deeper understanding of the human behaviours and emotions that go with it. Learning would never end and would constantly be enriched. Not for him was contentment with teaching according to the principles of orthodoxy; closed minds were not inquiring minds.

When the young people from Dalbeattie high school fly off to Italy in October they will face an unusual and rigorous challenge, which will test their skills to the limit. The da Vinci decathlon began in 2005 as an exciting offshoot of the successful da Vinci programme for gifted and talented students at Knox grammar school in Sydney. The challenge, which is designed to test and celebrate the higher-level academic gifts in a competitive environment, is of course run in the true spirit of the Olympic decathlon—the competition that is the ultimate test for athletes across many disciplines. It is a test of skill, resilience, mental and physical stamina and, of course, character.

The success of the da Vinci decathlon in Australia has been hugely impressive and it has clearly caught the imagination of the young people in Australia, as well as their parents and, I understand, many businesses. For them, the competition has proved to be such a success because of the rounded approach to learning that it brings to challenge young people.

As a member of the Education and Culture Committee of this Parliament, I am acutely aware of the constant refrain from employers in this country that we must do more to equip young people with the skills that cross several boundaries and disciplines, most especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which have become known as the STEM subjects. We need many more Scottish pupils to look to future careers in engineering and the sciences. The da Vinci challenge promotes exactly the sort of subjects that we need to encourage more enthusiastically.

One of the strong characteristics of the tradition of Scottish inventors is the appreciation that to understand engineering, one needs to understand how many other subjects interconnect with it. That is something that da Vinci would have appreciated very much. Some would argue that there are very good reasons for making engineering a compulsory subject; I can see the logic in that.

In the past few years there has been a very pleasing increase in the number of schools that are making a determined effort to develop slightly different extracurricular activities. I know from my time as a teacher the benefits that such activities bring, especially if they are that little bit different and most especially if they involve a trip abroad.

The Dalbeattie high school pupils and teachers are to be very warmly congratulated on their initiative and on their fundraising efforts, which Alex Fergusson has described. They have clearly put in a power of work on that and it is a great honour for them to be not just the only Scottish school but the only one from Europe taking part. I wish them every success and hope that this might be the start of a much wider uptake of the da Vinci challenge among Scottish schools.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call on the Scottish Parliament's very own renaissance man, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Mike Russell.

18:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): How very kind of you, Presiding Officer.

I am delighted to respond to the motion and to congratulate Alex Fergusson on having secured the debate. I am particularly delighted to congratulate the team that is going to Milan from Dalbeattie. As a former South of Scotland member of the Scottish Parliament, I know that we can learn a great deal from the south of Scotland. I also know that the baking in Dalbeattie is very good, although I regret that none has been brought here for us to sample today. I am certainly astonished to discover the amazing range of challenges that the young people will have to overcome when they go to Milan.

It is appropriate that we commend all of them and that we wish them the best of luck. With your permission, Presiding Officer, I will give them a name check. They are Jenna Miller, Matthew Campbell, Amy Scobie, Georgina Murray, Emma Forsyth, Ailsa O'Donoghue, Rhiannon Gerrard, Isla Parker, Catherine Kellett and Alex Lammie. The team leaders who are going to Milan are Piers Butler and Samantha Campbell. The observant among us will notice that there are nine girls and one boy in the team. No doubt in time there will be members on our benches who will argue for gender balance in the da Vinci competition, but that is a very good start and I commend the team for it.

I have to say that I was unaware of the challenge, but so were my officials when the debate was announced. It is fascinating that such an idea should come by means of an exchange teacher to Dalbeattie—one Zak Inward. I could not believe the name, but it was Zak Inward who brought the idea to Dalbeattie and encouraged the school to take part. The idea of an exchange from Knox academy—a wonderfully named school—to Dalbeattie and a trip on to Milan says something

about the interconnected nature of the world in which they live.

Our education system in Scotland is an interconnected one. It focuses on higher-order thinking skills, problem solving, teamwork and creativity, which is precisely what the team will have to show and undertake when they are in Milan. Their tasks will range from engineering to philosophy to code breaking to cartography, taking in science, English, art and poetry. They will carry out all those tasks to compete and, we hope—as Anne McTaggart said—to win. It is a wonderful reflection on Dalbeattie that its young people are going, and a wonderful reflection on Scotland that our curriculum can support that type of activity.

When I think of da Vinci, as I am sure all of us in the chamber do from time to time, I think of his logo, “The Vitruvian Man”—the man in two different positions. Perhaps that should be the logo for curriculum for excellence because it is about perfect proportion, interchangeability and connections. I thank him for drawing our attention to that and for reminding us of the importance of interconnectivity within our education system.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Presiding Officer,

Da Vinci's challenge we are told
is clearly for the bright and bold;
Not only must you read a map,
you'll need to be a thinking chap.
Can the Cab Sec let me know
which way he thinks the thing will go?
Are we all in time to find
our schools thus test each eager mind?

Michael Russell: I am not entirely sure that Mr Don is going to win the da Vinci challenge with that poetry, although he might win another challenge with it. However, he is quite right to say that there is a lesson for us all to learn, which I will draw briefly.

Our curriculum reforms in Scotland are driving essential change, with the learning journey from the age of 3 to 18 and beyond. Anne McTaggart was right to remind us of the role of community learning in that process; it is vital. The process of transformation that is required to deliver curriculum for excellence in full, and to improve Scottish education, continues. We are committed to finishing the job of delivering a curriculum that is fit for the challenges of our modern world—even that most intensive challenge that Dalbeattie high school has stepped up to the plate to take.

It is an unprecedented programme of transformation—curriculum for excellence is not quite like anything that takes place elsewhere. Lots of people are looking to Scotland to try to understand the system and how it may benefit them. The purpose is to improve children's and young people's achievements, attainment levels

and life chances through nurturing every individual young person as a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. That underpinning strength of curriculum for excellence will, I believe, benefit every school and young person in Scotland.

Liz Smith is right to draw attention to the STEM subjects and to engineering. In relation to science, we must ensure not just that our young people have those skills, but that our teachers are keen to impart those skills. They must see the importance of the STEM subjects—of science and engineering—as connecting subjects within schools and be keen to take them forward.

We must see other things, too, including the vision that the Government has for language learning and teaching, which are important. We are the first part of these islands to commit ourselves to the Barcelona system of learning one's own language and two others. Over two school generations, we will roll that out so that Scotland's experience of languages will be transformed. If Italian has not yet reached Dalbeattie high school, there will be some to be learned during the October break.

All across Scotland, curriculum for excellence is energising learning and teaching. It is making education more relevant to the modern world and is giving young people the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed in learning, life and work. I hope that it is also inculcating ambition, which is a wonderful thing. For Dalbeattie high school to have the ambition to compete and take part in something that no Scottish school—indeed, no school in these islands or in Europe, apparently—has yet taken part in is a tremendous achievement.

In Dalbeattie, as in the rest of Scotland, it is the learners who are the greatest natural resource. They are the investment for the future and are what the future will be. Curriculum for excellence is designed to support them, to take them forward and to allow them, through schools and other learning providers, to focus on individual need in the context—which we in Parliament should never forget—of education's having not just an individual benefit but a societal benefit. By investing in education, we invest in the whole future of our country.

I am grateful to Alex Fergusson for having brought this matter to Parliament, and I am grateful to the members who have spoken in the debate. Most of all, I am grateful to the team from Dalbeattie high school, who will have heard all the praise and excitement today. I hope that they enjoy the challenge, but they have a lot of hard work to do; they have a lot of research and learning to do, and they have a lot to work on in

the next six weeks. We should not, therefore, talk any longer; we should let them get on with it.

Meeting closed at 18:14.

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