



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Thursday 26 September 2013

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 26 September 2013

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 11:40*]

General Question Time

Sport (Regional Performance Centre in Dundee)

1. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what its financial commitment is to the regional performance centre in Dundee and when it will open. (S4O-02432)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): Funding for sporting infrastructure is routed through our national agency for sport, sportscotland, which has begun discussions with Dundee City Council on the new plans for a regional performance centre in Dundee. Those plans will determine the budget required for the project. It is expected that the centre will be completed by 2016.

Jenny Marra: Earlier this week, Ken Guild, leader of Dundee City Council, said

“We have to know exactly how much ... we will get”

from sportscotland. Can the minister tell him that?

Shona Robison: Discussions about the budget will follow the new plans; after all, one cannot set a budget without knowing what the new plans will look like and what they will cost. However, I can tell the member that the new steering group, in which the city's two football clubs, both universities, Dundee College, Angus College, NHS Tayside and, of course, Dundee City Council are involved, met on 17 September, and discussions have begun with sportscotland to amend the plans for the national performance centre to a regional performance centre model. Once all that is done, we will know what the required budget will be, and that will be taken forward through sportscotland and Dundee City Council.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

How will the regional performance centre build on the work of the community sport hubs and ensure that we get more children and young people in Dundee involved in sport?

Shona Robison: I expect that, as well as supporting elite athletes in the Tayside area, the new regional performance centre's inside and outside facilities will be very much community focused to allow many people of all ages, particularly young people, to enjoy sport. The centre will undoubtedly help young people in the area to be more active and will deliver a strong

legacy from the Commonwealth games on top of some of the other fantastic facilities that have recently been taken forward in Dundee.

Commonwealth Games 2014

2. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government how preparations for the 2014 Commonwealth games are progressing. (S4O-02433)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): Good progress continues to be made towards the successful delivery of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth games. With less than a year to go, the games remain on track to be delivered on time and on budget. All permanent sports venues have been completed and are already available for use by the public, and interest in ticket sales has been tremendous with more than 2.3 million requests for around 1 million tickets and at least 70 per cent of the tickets for every session being available to the public. Of course, the Queen's baton relay will begin its journey around the Commonwealth early next month.

Liz Smith: The level of demand for tickets is exceptionally good news. During the London Olympic and Paralympic games, 125,000 tickets were made available for young people to take advantage of the events. Will the same be true of the Commonwealth games?

Shona Robison: Plans and discussions are on-going with regard to a gift of the games initiative involving the games' partners, and there will be news about that quite soon.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The minister will be aware of Glasgow's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community's interest in and concerns about these matters. For example, it has not only organised positive initiatives such as pride house, which I gather the Government has given some support to, but highlighted the need to raise in as constructive a spirit as possible concerns about the record of Commonwealth countries in criminalising their LGBT communities. Is she willing to meet me to discuss how these interests and concerns can be given the most constructive possible expression during the games?

Shona Robison: I am certainly happy to meet the member to discuss such matters. We have an opportunity to promote a positive message about Scotland's journey and the progress that we have made, although I acknowledge that there is still progress to be made on these matters. If that journey can be an inspiration to others, I think that sharing our experience with others who might be at different stages in their own journey would be a very positive move.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Is the minister content that all venues and transport links will be fully accessible for people with disabilities?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government fully recognises the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities. We are working with the organising committee and public transport operators to ensure that the games are fully inclusive and accessible. To that end, Glasgow 2014 is currently finalising an accessible transport strategy, which will be published in November. Details of the strategy and the key principles for delivering accessible transport across the games network will be in that document.

Universities (Overseas Students)

3. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to universities to attract students from overseas. (S4O-02434)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): In Scotland, we welcome international students and researchers to our world-class institutions and value the significant cultural, economic and intellectual contribution that they make.

In addition to the dedicated staff that universities provide to attract international students, we provide funding through the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council for an international officer based at Universities Scotland who has responsibility for promoting Scottish higher education globally.

We also provide support through the saltire scholarships programme, the primary aim of which is to raise the profile of Scotland in key overseas markets as a place in which to live, work and study. The scholarships are designed to support the promotion of Scotland as a learning nation and a science nation.

In the research field, the scholarships for excellence programme provides funds to top researchers to come to Scottish universities to undertake their PhDs.

Kevin Stewart: In a letter that I received from the principal of the University of Aberdeen earlier this year, I was told that, since the removal of the post-study work scheme, the university has seen a drop in entrants from India of 60 per cent and from Nigeria of 22 per cent. What can be done to counter the damage that United Kingdom immigration policies and the UK Border Agency are doing to our capacity to attract overseas students to our universities?

Michael Russell: I am happy to provide a one-word answer to that: independence. The reality is

that the actions of the UKBA and the Home Office cause deep problems for all universities. Sir Ian Diamond, the principal of Aberdeen university, has been in the forefront of taking forward these issues.

Members of other parties like to shout that there is some other way. There is no other way. I heard Liam McArthur debate the issue in Dundee last week and saw that he could not provide any other way. The only way to deal with the matter is to have control of immigration in this Parliament. Then we will show our merit, which is to welcome students, not be suspicious of them.

Renewables (Department of Energy and Climate Change Consultation)

4. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Department of Energy and Climate Change's consultation on providing additional support for renewables on Scotland's islands. (S4O-02435)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government welcomes that important consultation. The intergovernmental group that I called for last year has helped to establish a clear evidence base for additional support for island renewables.

We must now deliver a solution that delivers for Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. I was therefore pleased that the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Ed Davey, committed to that at his party conference in Glasgow earlier this month. We are now working closely with the United Kingdom Government, our island partners and others towards an outcome that enables all the islands to harness their huge renewable energy potential.

Mike MacKenzie: I am concerned that the proposals that were announced in the consultation might not go all the way towards overcoming the range and extent of the barriers that are faced by renewable energy developers on the islands. What assurances can the minister give the sector that that aspect will be considered during the consultation?

Fergus Ewing: I share the member's concerns, particularly because DECC proposed a single contracts for difference uplift for island onshore wind at £115 per megawatt, whereas the Baringa islands renewables report recognised that each of the three island groups had different needs and circumstances.

I am keen to continue to work with DECC on this matter, but we will also continue to press the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets on its review of transmission charging—project transmit—for

outcomes that work for Scotland's islands, including looking again at the costs of converter stations. In addition, I am writing to Ofgem to invite the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority to visit the Western Isles to meet local stakeholders and hear what they have to say.

I want to work with everyone, across all parties, to deliver a good result for all three island groups. That is a top priority for me and for the Scottish Government.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome the minister's constructive response and acknowledge the work that the islands working group has done in progressing the issue. Does he agree that establishing the principle of a separate strike price for the islands is a significant move forward that allows encouragement for developments not just in Orkney, but in the other island groups as well?

Fergus Ewing: For both Mr McArthur and me, the glass is always half full. In that spirit, I welcome the fact that the principle has been accepted. Had the principle not been accepted, where would we be? However, there is more work to be done. Since the evidence report, which Mr Davey and I called for, produced the conclusion that the three islands—not surprisingly—had different needs and required different levels of support, the rational, evidence-based case has already been established to some extent. Nevertheless, more work needs to be done and I welcome the co-operation of Ed Davey and his colleagues thus far in reaching the establishment and acceptance of the principle.

Without that principle, the islands would be cut off from benefiting from their renewables potential, despite the fact that they are the best place in the world to develop our renewable energy. The matter could not be more serious, and I am delighted to carry on the work that we have been doing with Mr McArthur and his colleagues along with all other parties.

Child Protection

5. Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to improve child protection services. (S4O-02436)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that fast and effective protection is in place for children at risk of abuse and neglect. To that end, we have introduced new and strengthened guidance to ensure that all practitioners working with children are equipped to protect children who are at risk.

We have also twice overseen the inspection of child protection services in every part of Scotland.

The second round showed significant improvements overall, with 94 per cent receiving a positive report. Also, on 17 April 2013, we introduced the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill to Parliament. The bill is central to our aim of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up in.

Paul Martin: I have here a copy of the serious case review in respect of Daniel Pelka. Has the minister had the chance to read the review? What action is the Government taking to put in place every possible safeguard to ensure that, in Scotland, we minimise the risk of another case similar to that of Daniel Pelka?

Aileen Campbell: I respect the way in which Paul Martin has raised the matter. The death of Daniel Pelka is an absolute tragedy. A significant amount of work has been done on the issue over the past couple of years, particularly in the past seven or eight months. In November last year, we published the "National Risk Framework to Support the Assessment of Children and Young People". On 28 November last year, we published the "National Framework for Child Protection learning and development in Scotland 2013". We have refreshed and revised the pink book for health professionals, and we republished "Getting Our Priorities Right" in April this year for professionals specifically working with children and families for whom substance misuse is a factor. As I said, we have also published the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, which will strengthen the support that is available for vulnerable families.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, in the words of Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People,

"no place in the world can give a 100 per cent guarantee on the safety of all its children."

Nevertheless, the Scottish Government is very much committed to ensuring that every child is protected and safe from harm. Of course, we will never be complacent but will learn the lessons from what has happened in England in relation to the case that the member mentioned.

Environmental Projects (Community Benefits)

6. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions ministers have had with local authorities regarding the community benefits that arise from environmental projects. (S4O-02437)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Our aim is to maximise the opportunities for community benefits from renewable energy developments, and we recognise that national guidance on good practice would be welcome. Guidance is currently being

developed under our community and renewable energy scheme—CARES—in consultation with stakeholders. The aim is to publish that in the autumn.

James Dornan: Does the minister agree that it is imperative that local authorities consider that any community benefits from such projects should support the local community first and foremost? In Castlemilk and Carmunnock, in my constituency, the community has been informed that most of the profit from the local wind park, which was originally to be used for local community benefit, will now be made part of central funding by Glasgow City Council.

Fergus Ewing: We seek to work with all local authorities on these matters. I have not had specific discussions with Glasgow City Council on the issue, so it would probably not be correct for me to make any substantive comment thereon. Generally speaking, we seek to work with local authorities to ensure that communities can benefit from renewable energy developments in their own part of Scotland.

Dementia (Under-65s)

7. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has made of the issues faced by people under 65 with dementia. (S4O-02438)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): We know that, of the 86,000 people currently living with dementia in Scotland, around 3,000 are under 65. Next month, NHS Health Scotland will publish “Younger people with dementia: living well with your diagnosis”. Developed in partnership with Alzheimer Scotland, the booklet will provide a range of insights and information from younger people with dementia and their family carers, in their own words, about what helps them to live well with the diagnosis.

Under-65s with dementia face specific challenges. Rarer forms of dementia are more common in under-65s and can be more difficult to diagnose. Under-65s have different post-diagnostic support needs in, for example, maintaining their community connections and accessing peer support. Our national post-diagnostic target—underpinned by a commitment that, from 1 April this year, everyone diagnosed will, regardless of age, receive a minimum of a year’s worth of dedicated support that is co-ordinated by a trained link worker—is based on Alzheimer Scotland’s five-pillar, person-centred support model and will help to meet those needs.

David Stewart: As the cabinet secretary has rightly identified, in Scotland some 3,200 people under 65 have dementia. Many of those require help with personal care, such as continence

management and food and diet, but are required to pay for such help because they are under 65. Will the cabinet secretary agree to review the policy so that we provide free personal care for dementia sufferers who are under 65 years old?

Alex Neil: A range of additional support services are available to people with dementia under 65 years of age, including, in some cases, continuing healthcare. We keep such issues under constant review, because we want to ensure that the best health service support as well as the best social care support are available to people of all ages who have dementia.

Opencast Mine Restoration (East Ayrshire)

8. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what financial support it will provide to East Ayrshire Council to assist with the restoration of opencast mines. (S4O-02439)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): There is not now, nor has there ever been, any specific budgetary provision for restoration of opencast coal sites.

Graeme Pearson: I am obliged to the minister for that reply. As he will be aware, this month East Ayrshire Council received a report on the additional costs that it may face for restoring land that was previously used for opencast facilities, which the council will be incapable of financing in the medium term. Is he able to give some indication that he will take steps to alleviate that problem?

Fergus Ewing: As Mr Pearson and members from across parties will know, I have been working closely with Professor Russel Griggs in chairing a task force, on which all parties representing coaling areas are represented. We work closely with all the local authorities, with which we have productive relations. We are taking a number of steps, not least of which is the establishment of the independent Scottish Mines Restoration Trust, under the chairmanship of Russel Griggs. We have also explored, in a letter that I wrote to Mr Michael Fallon recently, the possibility of restoration to Scotland of some of the millions of pounds that have been paid from the levy of 17p per tonne from coal mined in Scotland, so that the money can be used towards restoration of the coal mines that are left in our country.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): What response has the minister had from the United Kingdom energy minister to his request that the coal authority levy of 17p per tonne of coal mined should be applied to restoration purposes? Unlike the Scottish Government, the UK Treasury has benefited from a significant income stream from opencast mining

and should surely assume more financial responsibility for its clear-up.

Fergus Ewing: I wrote to Michael Fallon only on 17 September, so it is probably unreasonable to expect to have received a detailed reply at this stage. I should make it clear that the total aggregate moneys involved would not be sufficient to solve the total problem by any means. Nonetheless, I think that the task force recognised that such a request is a reasonable thing for us to ask. The money was paid from the coal mined in Scottish communities. Surely there is a very strong case, given that most of the money went straight into the consolidated fund, for now using it to tackle the task of restoring Scotland's opencast mines that are coaled out.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-01582)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Why is the Scottish Government cutting help for victims of the bedroom tax by £20 million next year?

The First Minister: I should congratulate Johann Lamont first. If my memory serves me correctly, this is the first time she has mentioned the words "bedroom tax" and raised the matter at First Minister's questions. Now that the Labour Party feels itself to be in a position to address at First Minister's question time a huge issue that has affected people in Scotland over a matter of months, we should congratulate Johann Lamont on raising it at last.

As Johann Lamont well knows, the Scottish Government has made a substantial increase in discretionary housing payments—one and a half times what the Westminster Government was offering—in order to address, and to allow our local authorities to address, some of the worst aspects of the bedroom tax. That effective action has been welcomed by a wide range of organisations that care about the people of Scotland and talk about the bedroom tax all the time.

Johann Lamont: Yes, of course—but the problem with the First Minister is that he talks about the bedroom tax all the time, but does not act in the interests of ordinary people. If people were to be comforted by promises in the future, we would be in a strange place. What we can do now is what actually matters. There is £20 million this year, but there is nothing next year and, this year, there is half of what the organisations that he mentioned expected.

The real reason why the Scottish Government is cutting off support for the victims of the bedroom tax is that it sees injustice not as an opportunity to help people in Scotland who are suffering, but as one to be exploited ahead of the referendum. If the First Minister really wanted rid of the bedroom tax, he would urge voters in England in 2015 to vote Labour to abolish it—[*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

Johann Lamont: —rather than asking them to vote for Nick Clegg, as he did in 2010. The memory banks have been wiped, but the evidence of the First Minister's poor judgment is seen again in that.

We know that the First Minister does not agree with John Swinney on renationalising postal services, on pensions or on the public finances. Does he agree with his Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth that the reason why the Government will not help victims of the bedroom tax is that it does not want to let Westminster "off the hook"? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: The finance secretary, John Swinney, has helped victims of the bedroom tax. I will quote the people who talk about the bedroom tax all the time. Shelter Scotland's Graeme Brown said:

"We are delighted that the Scottish Government has listened to Shelter Scotland's campaign and is making £20 million available to help thousands more households ... affected by the so-called bedroom tax."

Children in Scotland's chief executive Jackie Brock said:

"Whilst Scotland does not have the power to change the policy, we are pleased to see the Scottish Government utilizing the powers they do have to help mitigate the impact on our most vulnerable households."

Let us not have it from Johann Lamont that John Swinney has not helped people who are afflicted by the bedroom tax. That is the effective action that the Scottish National Party Government has taken.

In Johann Lamont's question was something more interesting. She says that what we must do in order not to have the bedroom tax imposed on the people of Scotland is to make an appeal to people in England to vote Labour. That is the sum total of the Labour Party's ambition for the people of Scotland. Many people in Scotland—this party, other parties and many people throughout Scotland—say that the way to stop iniquities such as the bedroom tax being imposed on the Scottish people is to take the power over social security so that we can build the society that we want to have.

Johann Lamont: John Swinney has given less than half of what people asked for this year and will give them nothing next year. The reason why he will give them nothing next year is that that is another justification for separation, rather than a policy that should be tackled.

The First Minister is fond of saying that the best people to make decisions about Scotland are the people who live here, and who care most about Scotland. He has the power to help victims of the bedroom tax now and, with an underspend of

£179 million last year, he has the funds. Is it not the case that although the First Minister might live in Scotland, he has decided not to act because he does not care about the victims of the bedroom tax and would rather exploit their pain?

The First Minister: Of course, the £20 million that we are providing is the limit, under the powers that we have at present. That is exactly what Shelter asked for.

Let us return to the question of where these matters should be governed and settled. I presume that even Johann Lamont and the Labour Party do not believe that the Scottish Government can find resources to cope with all the welfare changes that are being imposed on the Scottish people. I presume that they accept that, in conjunction with our colleagues in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we have done what we can on council tax benefit. I presume that Johann Lamont understands that the reinforcement of the ability of Scotland's charities to help people who are in extremity has been an important move to make, and I presume that she concedes that Shelter asked for £20 million because it realised that that is the legal limit that exists under the powers of this Parliament.

If it is accepted—as it is by many people, including the charities—that we are doing everything we can, within the powers that we have, to mitigate the effect of Westminster-imposed cutbacks on the Scottish people, surely the solution is obvious. If we want not to have the bedroom tax, and if we do not want people with disability to be subjected to humiliation, why cannot we in this country have the power to frame our own welfare system so that it meets the ambitions of the Scottish people?

Johann Lamont: If the First Minister was interested in his day job, he would know that there is not a £20 million limit on what he can spend. Even if that were true, it does not explain why he is not putting any money into next year's budget. There is nothing there.

Perhaps another reason why the Government is not helping is that, instead of having civil servants try to improve the lives of Scots and to find ways of supporting people, the First Minister has them writing fantasy plans for a Scottish air force, Scottish embassies and our own secret service.

While the First Minister has been doing that, between trips to the Ryder cup and Wimbledon—I advise him not to go again to Wimbledon and behave in the way that he did this year—we have been working. I have here the bill that can protect Scotland from the bedroom tax. It has been lodged in Parliament today and it has support from the very organisations that the First Minister has cited. Instead of cutting help for victims of the bedroom

tax, will the First Minister pledge to sign this bill now and do the right thing by Scotland, rather than the right thing by the SNP?

The First Minister: It is now six months since SNP councils across the country moved to a no-evictions policy. That did not meet with unanimous support: on 25 March 2013, Aberdeen City Council, which is led by Labour in alliance with the Tories, rejected the motion that called for no evictions. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: On 13 February, the Labour-Tory alliance in Falkirk Council rejected the SNP motion. This spring, the Labour Party refused to endorse the no-evictions policy that was being implemented by SNP councils across Scotland, and we all know that Labour-run North Lanarkshire Council was trying to evict a disabled single mum until the *Daily Record* exposed it on 22 August. It was only after the council leader, Jim McCabe, was confronted by Ms Fraser and the *Daily Record* that the eviction threat was withdrawn. If the Labour Party's concern is for people across Scotland who are under the heel of the bedroom tax, why did it not support the SNP's policy of there being no evictions across Scotland?

But then, of course, Johann Lamont has a track record these days: it is of waiting to raise the bedroom tax until it was said at the Labour conference that—finally—the Labour Party is prepared to argue for a repeal of the tax. For six months, we have been waiting, with different interpretations from different Labour figures in Scotland, because they have been waiting for God, or for Ed Miliband, to give them the sign that they could argue for repeal. It has been six months since Nicola Sturgeon pledged to repeal the bedroom tax in an independent Scotland.

It is absolutely extraordinary to argue, as Johann Lamont and Jackie Baillie do, not that we could not control social security in Scotland, but that we should not control social security in Scotland. That is why the majority of the Scottish people see the route forward for social security—so that we can banish the bedroom tax from Scotland and banish the iniquities that are being foisted on people with disabilities—as being to take the power in this country to have a social security system—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: —that is fair and which meets the aspirations of the Scottish people.

Secretary of State for Scotland (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Secretary of State for Scotland. (S4F-01573)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): No plans in the near future.

Ruth Davidson: On Tuesday, Nicola Sturgeon stood in the chamber and, when talking about pensions, said:

“those who try to perpetuate the myth that Scotland's population is somehow uniquely ageing or ageing faster than that of the rest of the UK are simply wrong.”—*[Official Report, 24 September 2013; c 22775.]*

However, National Records of Scotland says:

“The age structure of Scotland's population means that it is projected to age more rapidly compared to the UK.”

The First Minister's deputy says that Scotland is ageing more slowly, while his Government's own agency says the exact opposite. Which is correct?

The First Minister: I heard the exchange between Gavin Brown and Nicola Sturgeon, so I have the exact detail on this. The dependency ratio in Scotland is currently below that of the United Kingdom, with an estimated 589 dependants per 1,000 people of working age in 2013 compared with 615 for the UK as a whole. From around 2026, the gap between the Scottish and UK dependency ratios is projected to decrease. That is exactly the population projections and the same data source cited by National Records of Scotland to the Scottish Parliament in the 2010-based forecast. We now have the 2011 census.

The paper sets out the dependency ratio, which is the internationally accepted standard measure of population pressures showing the ratio of dependants to those of working age. Far from ignoring the National Records of Scotland, we used NRS projections and involved NRS staff in drafting that section of the report.

I hope that that detail satisfies Ruth Davidson, as indeed it should have satisfied Gavin Brown two days ago.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister is absolutely correct. The Scottish Government, in its paper on Monday, used some National Records of Scotland projections. It used the projections that show that, between 2010 and 2035, the number of pensioners in Scotland will increase by 26 per cent while the number in the rest of the UK will increase by 28 per cent. What it did not include was the fact that the number of people of working age in the rest of the UK will increase by 16 per cent and the working-age population of Scotland will increase by just 7 per cent over the same period.

That matters, because Monday's pensions paper said that, under independence, Scots could retire earlier and on more money because Scotland's population was ageing at a different rate from that in the rest of the UK. National Records of Scotland shows that 7 per cent to 26

per cent is 3.71 pensioners for every worker—more than twice the rate of the rest of the UK.

The First Minister talked about dependants. That was another pauchling of the figures on Monday, because the figures that the Government used when talking about pensions—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ruth Davidson: It would be worth while for the First Minister's back benchers to listen to this.

The figures that the Government used compared the ratio of workers with the ratio of pensioners and children but, as everyone knows, when we are dealing with pensions, it is the ratio of workers to pensioners that counts.

All Monday's promises, such as they are, are based on the Scottish National Party convincing people that Scotland's demographic time bomb is not the same as those in other countries. That is just not true. The Government knew that all along, as its own agency told it. The First Minister pauchled the figures. Is not it the case that the SNP's pension policy just does not add up?

The First Minister: I am not certain that Ruth Davidson is fully in command of the subject. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: I will say three things to Ruth Davidson. First, the dependency ratio is the number of under-16s and those over pensionable age per 1,000 people of working age. That is what the dependency ratio is.

Secondly, the review of the increase in when the pension is paid in the pensions paper is based on another matter: it is based on life expectancy at age 65, which is 1.2 years higher in the United Kingdom than in Scotland for women and 1.3 years higher for men. Obviously, we want to do something about life expectancy, but it is not fair to ignore that reality in deciding the appropriate pension age, and we doubt very much whether the UK Government, in increasing the pension age, took into account those life expectancy figures in Scotland. In fairness, it is reasonable to propose a pension age that is appropriate to Scottish conditions, and that has been welcomed by a range of experts.

Thirdly, given the Tory track record, I am fascinated by the fairly blatant scaremongering on pensions. I was therefore interested in a letter that one of my constituents in Aberdeenshire sent to the Department for Work and Pensions pensions service. The reply that was received said:

"In reply to your letter regarding your state pension if Scotland votes for independence, if Scotland does become independent, this will have no effect on your state pension. You will continue to receive it just as you do at present."

Given that the pensions service, which is an agency of the UK Government, is sending such definitive information to my constituents in Aberdeenshire, it ill behoves Labour or Tory scaremongers to come to the chamber with a scaremongering agenda. I have the letter from the Department for Work and Pensions. I presume that Ruth Davidson welcomes that reassurance.

The Presiding Officer: Alison McInnes has a supplementary question.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

Today, the Scottish fire service board is voting on the closure of six of the eight emergency control rooms in Scotland. People across Scotland, including in my North East Scotland constituency, where the control room in Aberdeen is under threat, will be deeply concerned.

Local knowledge of our communities and the geography of each area is vital to ensuring that the right rapid response is dispatched to each emergency. There is a very real risk that having only two control centres, in Dundee and Johnstone, will mean the loss of that crucial local knowledge and increase risks to lives. The Scottish Government has taken away all local decision making on that. Will the First Minister step in to halt that irrational and dangerous move?

The First Minister: That is not a reasonable presentation of what the fire service's board is doing. As it pointed out, the single fire service changes are very decentralised in terms of the impact that they will have on giving people assurance that firefighters will be able to attend local conditions in the most effective and efficient way.

Any Liberal Democrat should have a care in talking about the fire service at the present moment. I presume that the people who care most about the fire service are firefighters and the people in the service. I remind the member as gently as I possibly can that, in England and Wales, under the control of the Tories and Liberal Democrats, firefighters are currently on strike, just as the Scottish Government and the Fire Brigades Union are trying to find a settlement that will avoid a strike in Scotland. Any Liberal Democrat who comes to the chamber and weeps crocodile tears for the fire service should look at the total disarray south of the border.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):

To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-01584)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: On Monday, I met John Young from Patna in Ayrshire to see for myself the devastation left by Scottish Coal at the Dunstonhill opencast mine. The financial shortfall to restore the mines in East Ayrshire alone has risen to an estimated £130 million, and the figure could be higher, as there is a real doubt that all the restoration bonds can be recovered.

Despite the growing restoration bill, the council has now given permission to mine for coal at two sites, without there being any bonds or financial guarantees. Hargreaves mining company will not pick up the cost of restoring the sites if the mines fail again.

John Young is angry that his community has been ripped off by mining companies and let down by his council and his Government. Will the First Minister step in and stop this reckless behaviour?

The Presiding Officer: Before the First Minister responds, I remind members, as I did at the beginning of last week's debate on opencast, that there is a live case on restoration before the Court of Session. Members should take care to avoid mentioning the details of that case.

The First Minister: In terms of your guidance, Presiding Officer, Willie Rennie should, in fairness, look at the efforts that Fergus Ewing and councils not just in Ayrshire but elsewhere in Scotland are making to come to an effective settlement that provides for restoring what can be restored, protects the environment for the future, builds a better system and, of course—the thing that Willie Rennie did not mention—preserves vital employment in an important industry.

Given the efforts that the minister has made, in conjunction with local councils across Scotland—councils of different political persuasions, incidentally—I do not think that a reasonable person could come to any conclusion other than that the minister is acting in the best interests of and balancing the interests of people in the communities of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: There are signs that the industry could fail again. The world coal price remains low and the insurance bond market is closed. The Scottish Government seems incapable of reading those signs. Not only is the Government supporting mining without financial guarantees—the very problem that got us into this situation in the first place—but I have discovered that its own agency, Scottish Enterprise, is proposing to give taxpayers' money to Hargreaves mining company. Public funds are going to an industry that has already ripped us off.

Surely it is time to call a halt to this environmental injustice and economic madness. Will the First Minister act now, or will he sit idle

while the companies rip us and our environment off again?

The First Minister: That is not a reasonable way to portray the efforts of the energy minister.

At no stage in either question did Willie Rennie express the slightest sympathy with, endorsement of or solidarity with the workers in the industry. I do not think that an argument on such an important issue that does not balance councils' and communities' concerns, environmental concerns and concerns about employment in places such as Ayrshire and Fife offers a reasonable perspective.

I look forward to the day when Willie Rennie meets the workers who he proposes should not have jobs, to look them in the eye and tell them exactly what the Liberal Democrat policy is.

Royal Mail Privatisation

4. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Prime Minister has responded to his letter calling for a moratorium on the privatisation of the Royal Mail. (S4F-01587)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I am disappointed that I have not yet heard from the Prime Minister. It is clear that the people of Scotland resoundingly do not want this misguided privatisation and that the moratorium should be confirmed as soon as possible.

Stewart Stevenson: It is surprising that the First Minister has not had a response.

Yesterday, Labour Party members, at their conference in Brighton, overwhelmingly backed a resolution that called for the renationalisation of the Royal Mail should the sell-off go ahead. Will the First Minister urge Mr Miliband to back the position of the Scottish Government by publicly endorsing the views of his party, which could render the privatisation infeasible?

The First Minister: It is true that I have not had a response from the Prime Minister, but I seem to have got a response from the Labour Party conference, which is all to the good. Now that, after six months, the Labour Party has followed the Scottish National Party policy of repeal of the bedroom tax, we should welcome the Labour conference's endorsement of our call to take the Royal Mail back into public hands.

I am told that the resolution was passed overwhelmingly. I hear that it might even have been passed unanimously. I presume that that means that the Scottish delegates at the conference, such as Johann Lamont, voted for the renationalisation of the Royal Mail. [*Interruption.*] I do not know why Johann Lamont is pointing; I am just saying that if the resolution was passed nearly unanimously, I assume that she was there,

speaking for the majority wishes of the unions and Labour Party members. That makes the attacks that I had from MSPs following First Minister's questions last week all the more strange. So, which is it: the response to public ownership that we saw so resoundingly from the Labour conference, or the back calling at the SNP that we saw from Labour MSPs last week?

Older People (Residential Care)

5. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to improve the quality of residential care for older people. (S4F-01577)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Government is committed to ensuring the highest possible standards in the residential care sector. We require the Care Inspectorate to inspect every care home in Scotland unannounced at least once every year. Additional inspections are carried out in the services at greatest risk, which means that those services are now inspected several times a year to ensure that the required improvements are being made.

Neil Findlay: The Pentland Hill care home in Edinburgh has had a series of poor inspection reports. The most recent one was truly appalling and there is now a police investigation into four deaths. Does the First Minister agree that there is something seriously wrong with an inspection regime when it has repeatedly identified problems in key areas but little or nothing appears to have been improved?

The First Minister: I cannot comment on an on-going police investigation—there are strict rules on that.

Let us take the general issue. Most people would accept and agree that the new inspection regime for care homes is a substantial improvement. I see Jackie Baillie sitting in her place. She will remember that she welcomed it comprehensively on 15 September 2011 in the Parliament. It is a hugely, substantially better regime than that which it replaced. The importance of the unannounced inspections and the follow-up inspections is that whether we are dealing with issues in the health service or issues in care homes, the absolute priority is to have an inspection regime that brings these matters to light. The real difficulties, as we have seen tragically elsewhere in the health service or care homes, come when, over a prolonged period of time, safety issues are left unaddressed. It is the whole purpose of the inspection regime to identify such problems. I am sure that the various investigations, including the police investigation, will be carried through without fear or favour and will do whatever else is required.

I should say that Alex Neil has asked Bupa directors to meet him later today to discuss in more detail what urgent steps they have been taking to improve the quality of residential care across all their Scottish homes.

Mobile Phone Coverage (Rural Areas)

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had with providers of mobile phone services to improve coverage in rural areas. (S4F-01574)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): We are committed to improving mobile coverage across rural Scotland. We are working collaboratively with four mobile operators to address issues around coverage and performance at both ministerial and official level. The Deputy First Minister met Three on 20 May and the Minister for Local Government and Planning met EE on 17 September.

We acknowledge that mobile coverage in rural areas is substandard. The Office of Communications data, of course, said that 96.6 per cent of the population had 3G coverage—91 per cent in rural areas. I am sure that Liz Smith welcomed the Scottish Government's evaluation of that data and its republication. We suspected that that Ofcom data did not give the complete picture of our experience in rural areas.

Liz Smith: The Scottish Government's report has made it very clear that in something like 60 per cent of Perth and Kinross and 53 per cent of Stirlingshire there is no 3G coverage, which obviously has an impact on individuals and businesses, particularly if somebody has to contact the emergency services. What discussions is the Scottish Government having with local authorities to bring forward plans to use the £150 million of investment that is available from the United Kingdom Government to help this process?

The First Minister: I think that Liz Smith will agree that, given that the previous Ofcom stats were the only ones available, the first step was the welcome "Mobile Performance and Coverage" report from 16 September, which has just been published to address that and to try to explain why we felt that the Ofcom figures were not carrying forward the true picture in much of rural Scotland. I am sure that she also welcomes the fact that we have already engaged with the mobile operators. There will certainly be engagement with local authorities in terms of rolling out the substantial and very ambitious improvement plan.

I welcome the fact that Liz Smith has come with a question addressing mobile coverage and has not made the blunder of her better together colleagues by suggesting that somehow mobile charges would be higher in an independent

Scotland. I think that we can safely say that that particular piece of project fear has been thoroughly debunked.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): This is an important issue for my Arran constituents. The emergency medical retrieval service, which transfers critically ill patients from remote and rural areas, relies on mobile phones to operate and has expressed concern at the lack of coverage. The First Minister will know that, for years, United Kingdom ministers have failed to remedy the situation. Although Ed Vaizey, the UK Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, said that coverage would be rolled out by 2015, there is no indication when it will happen in the lead-up to that date, despite the fact that the EMRS has said that mobile phone coverage for Arran is the number 1 priority for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Can we get a question, Mr Gibson?

Kenneth Gibson: Does the First Minister agree that the UK Government should redouble its efforts to deliver mobile coverage and will he press it to do so?

The First Minister: We have been working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that the mobile infrastructure project has maximum impact. For example, we have recently helped to facilitate discussions between the supplier Arqiva and Scottish local authorities, which, as has been said, have a crucial role to play in the project given their role in local planning decisions.

The Deputy First Minister will seek clarification from DCMS on the member's behalf about the expected impact of the initiative on Arran because, as he rightly says, there are particular issues that give the matter even more importance than it has in the many other rural areas of Scotland.

Offshore Safety

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-07521, in the name of Richard Baker, on the safety of offshore oil and gas workers. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament offers its condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the Super Puma helicopter crash off Shetland on 23 August 2013; considers that the impact of this tragedy will be felt across the oil and gas industry and by the thousands of workers in the North Sea; believes that this event has been a sad reminder of the crucial importance of health and safety in the industry; recognises the concerns that have arisen as this is the fifth incident in four years involving a Super Puma helicopter; believes that the fact that a fatal accident inquiry has still to commence into the Super Puma crash that took place in 2009 in which 16 people lost their lives shows the need for new legislation to overhaul the current fatal accident inquiry system, and notes that a draft member's bill that would include provision for such action to be taken is currently out for consultation.

12:33

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab):

The tragic helicopter crash on 23 August, 2 miles west of Sumburgh, in which four people lost their lives, has brought the issue of offshore safety to the fore once more. On 4 September, Parliament heard a statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth in which he spoke for all of us when he expressed our deepest sympathy and condolences for the families, friends and colleagues who had lost loved ones that day.

Following the statement, members across the chamber focused on the need to ensure that all necessary action is taken so that the safety of the helicopter fleet can meet the highest standards for the future and to instil confidence among the workforce in the helicopter fleet, which had been shattered in the aftermath of the tragedy.

I thank those members who signed my motion to allow this debate to take place today. The motion follows that most recent tragedy, but it also reflects on the sad and deeply concerning fact that this incident was the fifth in four years in which a Super Puma helicopter had ditched.

That raises many questions about how we improve helicopter safety in the future. Members will, I am sure, reflect on a number of important and different aspects of how we should achieve that, but at the heart of the motion is an issue that is highlighted by events since the tragedy that took place in 2009—which we all remember all too well—when 16 people lost their lives. Today, four

years after that crash, a fatal accident inquiry has still not taken place.

I lodged the motion as a result of the campaign that my trade union, Unite, has taken forward on behalf of its members, and offshore representatives of Unite join us from Aberdeen today. They are calling for the Scottish Government to support the proposals that my colleague Patricia Ferguson has made in her proposed inquiries into deaths (Scotland) bill. A key aspect of that bill is to make the process of fatal accident inquiries quicker and more transparent.

Speaking in the days after the fatal crash this August, Unite's Scottish secretary, Pat Rafferty, said:

"Friday's horrific events should now compel the Scottish Government to ensure the safe passage through Parliament of Patricia Ferguson's FAI reforms. On Thursday we vented our anger over the current FAI process and the ridiculous delays in starting the FAI into the 2009 Super Puma crash, the agony this is causing victims' families, and the fact that we do not have legally enforceable outcomes from the process."

That last comment from Pat Rafferty gets to the nub of the issue. Ensuring that the FAI process is not so protracted in the future is vital for those who have lost loved ones. It is also vital for offshore workers today, who need to have confidence that any lessons that need to be learned from previous accidents have been learned and that action has been taken as a result so that they can be as safe as possible when travelling to their work offshore.

All of us in the chamber want to have a helicopter fleet in the North Sea that has the best possible safety standards and in which offshore workers have confidence. However, the fact that in addition to having had this number of incidents in the past few years we have had such an on-going delay in the FAI into the 2009 crash has only undermined that confidence further. It is not only Unite that has these concerns, as is evidenced by the briefing that members had from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers ahead of the debate.

Last week in *The Press and Journal*, the Lord Advocate stated that he did not wish to see a delay to an FAI into the fatal crash in August. That is a welcome statement. However, the question must be, without legislation, how will that ambition be achieved? When I questioned the cabinet secretary on that issue after his statement, he pointed to the fact that the inquiries by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch have taken two and a half years. Of course that is an important aspect and investigations can be complex, but that does not in itself account for a delay of four years or indeed for a year's delay from the decision last January by Crown counsel that there would be no

criminal charges into the 2009 crash to the point where we expect the inquiry to be held next January.

A number of steps require to be taken in light of these accidents. Of course, action within the industry is vital and I know that the helicopter safety steering group is working assiduously to address those issues. The recent announcement of a review of seating arrangements in the aircraft is welcome—although some people would say that it is not before time—as is the Civil Aviation Authority review, in collaboration with its Norwegian counterpart. That is welcome because, as Nanette Milne pointed out after the ministerial statement on the tragedy, the record of safety in Norway is good and perhaps we can learn lessons from Norway. However, it remains important, given the number of incidents, that there is now a full, independent inquiry—in the same way that the Cullen inquiry took place after the Piper Alpha tragedy. Therefore I hope that ministers will support the call from my colleague Frank Doran MP for the United Kingdom Government to instigate such a review.

The key thing for us in this Parliament is to take what action we can to promote safety and this Parliament can act to ensure that there are no longer any unnecessarily protracted waits for FAIs—waits that prolong the suffering for families seeking answers and potentially delay action that requires to be taken to improve safety for the future. I hope that ministers and other members will give serious consideration to the campaign that is being taken forward by Unite and the bill that is being brought forward by Patricia Ferguson, because we believe that this is a crucial issue if we are to put first the goal that Unite and its members and workers have identified: to protect and serve the interests of the industry's most important resource—its people.

12:40

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I apologise because I might not be able to remain in the chamber until the end of the debate. I have constituents visiting Parliament today and the arrangements were made well in advance of me knowing that this members' business debate would take place.

I congratulate Richard Baker on securing the debate. I will focus on helicopter safety, although I will refer to his comments about the fatal accident inquiry.

The heliport and helicopter operators are based in Dyce in my constituency. Having grown up in Dyce, I am very familiar with the movements of helicopters and helicopter noise. Indeed, I have developed something of an immunity to the noise

that helicopters make. However, it was interesting to hear the stark silence that pervaded the area when the helicopter flights were grounded, and the lack of helicopter movements around the community was noticeable.

Many of my constituents, family and friends are directly or indirectly involved in the offshore industry and the flights. I have heard many tales of family members such as partners and children being deeply concerned for the safety of those whom they love having to be transported by helicopter to the rigs. I have spoken to a number of individuals who have said that, although we obviously have to look at the overall safety record of the helicopters, they are concerned about the number of incidents that have taken place during a fairly short period of time.

In my question to the cabinet secretary following his statement, I mentioned that I had attended school with one of the victims of the 2009 fatal accident. Stuart Wood was in the year below me at Dyce academy, and I notice that his mother has recently commented in the press about the delays to the fatal accident inquiry. We all wish to place on the record our desire to see that fatal accident inquiry take place as soon as possible to ensure that some of the questions that the victims' families have can be addressed.

We need to look at the context of what is happening with helicopter safety. I am sure that this week's announcements were not prompted by Richard Baker's members' business debate today, but they have taken precedence during the past few days. Announcements have been made about the CAA review, and I welcome the fact that the Norwegian Civil Aviation Authority will be involved in that review because, as we understand it, the Norwegian safety record is somewhat better than that of the UK. It is very welcome that the Norwegian CAA's head of helicopter safety will be working very closely with us on that review.

There have been recent reports that the seating configuration on Super Puma helicopters will be looked at. That issue was raised during meetings that I and other MSPs had with Eurocopter and it, too, needs to be factored into the review. Yesterday's announcement from three other operators that they are to launch their own reviews and are calling for other helicopter operators to become involved in that review bears witness to the fact that a lot of work is being done at the moment.

I am not necessarily 100 per cent in agreement with Richard Baker, because the landscape of review and inquiry could become cluttered. There is a point at which we must ask where we step back and allow some of the work that is being done to take place so that the lessons from that work can be applied to any future inquiry or

review, rather than running parallel inquiries and running the risk of missing some of those lessons. That is the area in which I would say that I am not necessarily 100 per cent in agreement with Mr Baker.

12:44

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Richard Baker on bringing the debate to the Parliament, and I also congratulate Patricia Ferguson on preparing a bill to reform fatal accident inquiries.

Twenty-five years ago, after the Piper Alpha disaster, survivors and bereaved families demanded change in the culture and regulation of safety offshore. Trade unions such as the Transport and General Workers Union and the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee campaigned for workers to have the right to elect safety representatives offshore, while members of Parliament such as Frank Doran called for the regulation of offshore safety to be separated from the functions of the energy department.

It is therefore fitting that offshore safety reps are in the public gallery for our debate; that unions such as Unite and the RMT are again campaigning for change, along with the British Airline Pilots Association; and that there is a growing demand for an independent public inquiry into helicopter transport in the North Sea. That inquiry must be UK wide, because the issues affect the whole UK sector and because regulation of civil aviation is the responsibility of the UK Department for Transport. However, the Scottish ministers are responsible for inquiries into the causes of fatal accidents in Scottish waters, so they can act on that. I hope that, as Richard Baker said, we will have FAs in the coming months not just on the 2009 disaster but on this year's fatal accident.

A number of inquiries have been announced. The House of Commons Transport Committee, the Civil Aviation Authority and the helicopter operating companies have all said that they will undertake inquiries or reviews of one sort or another. Those are all welcome, but they will not of themselves answer all the questions that the families, survivors and those who work offshore are asking. Workers in the UK sector know that Norway has a better recent record on helicopter safety, but they will want to know why that is. Is it because of the hours that pilots fly, the maintenance regimes that are in place or the regulatory regimes within which helicopter companies operate?

As Richard Baker and Mark McDonald said, those people welcome this week's announcement that Eurocopter will look at reconfiguring the seats

on helicopters to improve safety, but they ask whether there should be fewer seats or emergency lighting at doors or windows to help people to escape in the dark. FAls and an independent inquiry can help us to understand those things and to answer other questions such as whether helicopter operating companies should be empowered to set standards for the equipment that is issued to their passengers by third parties; whether helicopters should fly at all when the waves are so high that fast rescue craft cannot be launched; and whether safety reps offshore have enough time to carry out their duties in full and enough confidence to raise concerns before things go wrong.

Following Lord Cullen's public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster, he recommended many changes, which were endorsed by all concerned and which have made a real difference to the culture of safety offshore. Many years later, the same Lord Cullen recommended changes to the system of fatal accident inquiries, but those recommendations have not yet been implemented.

Today, the North Sea is a mature oil province and much of the offshore infrastructure is nearing the end of its design life. From now on, making profits will demand much higher rates of investment, so the need for effective maintenance is increasing just as the financial rewards become harder to obtain. That is why this is a good time for a comprehensive review of safety in the North Sea, starting with the journey to and from work. Early and effective fatal accident inquiries can help to set a new benchmark for the next 40 years, and I urge ministers to help make that happen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Maureen Watt, to be followed by Alex Johnstone. I must keep members tightly to their time.

12:48

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I, too, thank Richard Baker for the opportunity to record our horror at the recent Super Puma crash and the tragic loss of life, which highlights the risks that offshore workers take every day in securing our oil and gas supplies. It also gives us the opportunity to express again our condolences to the families and our thanks to all the rescue services that were involved.

I am always amazed that people manage to escape from helicopter crashes. I have done the helicopter evacuation training several times and, even in a swimming pool, it is pretty scary. If you do not get it right, you end up in a human washing machine. Although in the recent crash the helicopter landed without turning over, I welcome the industry's consideration of the reconfiguration of seating, because it is miraculous when people

escape in a sea situation rather than in a swimming pool. I am amazed by how calmness and the training kick in.

I am old enough to remember when Chinooks provided helicopter journeys to the North Sea installations. I must admit that I was very glad when they were withdrawn, because I found them particularly scary. However, it should be remembered that helicopters are a vital method of transportation to the offshore rigs and platforms, because there are also great risks involved in ship transfer to the installations.

I hope that all members here and other members will come to the next meeting of the cross-party group on oil and gas—on 8 October in room P1.02—which will discuss the helicopter accidents. I welcome the inquiries that are taking place and I note that one of them involves all the helicopter operators coming together to review their operations and share best practice. However, I am saddened that BALPA has said that the investigations are “too little, too late”. I hope that BALPA will fully engage in the investigations.

I am glad that the CAA announced yesterday that its investigation will be done, as others have mentioned, in conjunction with the Norwegian Civil Aviation Authority and the European Aviation Safety Agency. The investigation will take in all the Super Puma accidents in the past four years and operators' decision making; internal management; protection of passengers; crew and pilot training and performance; and helicopter airworthiness. I look forward to hearing the results of that.

We should mention, too, the boots on for safety campaign, in which all the oil operators are engaging with all employees—offshore and onshore—and reassuring them about safety and that people who have real concerns about travelling offshore and who do not want to will be handled with sympathy and consideration. I hope that the trade unions will keep an eye on that, because I would hate for anyone to lose their job just because of the particularly high anxiety that exists at the moment.

It is important to wait for the outcome of the inquiries rather than rush to find any particular answer regarding the crashes, and I hope that that will happen.

12:52

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Richard Baker for bringing this issue back to the chamber. Less than a month ago, we were able to listen to a ministerial statement and respond to it, but it is extremely important to keep the issue on the parliamentary agenda.

The fact is that the journey to and from work is a frustration for many and an annoyance to some, but for those who make that journey to and from the installations in the North Sea it is a significant and important duty that we should never underestimate. The number of accidents that have happened in the North Sea has served only to make the frustration greater. It is important that we realise that one of our primary responsibilities is to ensure that the confidence of those who use helicopters in the North Sea is increased wherever possible. That is why it is so important that many of the things that are already happening continue and deliver in the longer term.

I pay tribute to the work of the helicopter safety steering group and its role at the initial phase of the process, when confidence in the helicopters was undermined overnight but returned fairly quickly after discussion and reports. It is important that there is an inclusive group, and the role of bringing the industry together with trade unions and other interested parties in the grouping is vital for the level of confidence that is delivered when an accident happens. I congratulate the group on its work.

Since then, of course, we have had the announcement that there will be a CAA review into the broader issues of helicopter safety in the North Sea. That is an important step forward, which I welcome. The fact that the review will also take into account what is happening in the Norwegian sector and perhaps give us the opportunity to draw comparisons between safety records and what is being done to achieve them will be something that will deliver in the long term.

The key element in the motion is the issue of fatal accident inquiries and the fact that there was no FAI into the worst of the fatal accidents, which happened in 2009 and left 16 dead. I am no expert in this interesting area, but I think that the motion brings an extra dimension to Patricia Ferguson's proposal that, given the changed context, the Conservatives will seriously consider. I look forward to speaking to Patricia Ferguson and others to ensure that we take this opportunity to do the right thing.

Solidarity will be not only vital in ensuring that the industry is strong and able to withstand these pressures, but important in the chamber to ensure that we go forward united in a well-thought-out direction that allows us to deliver the improved safety standards and confidence that are vital to the industry's future. I undertake to do all that I can to ensure that we have cross-chamber solidarity.

12:55

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Richard Baker on

bringing this issue back to the chamber for debate. Given the time constraints, I will not go over the ground that other members have already covered about the work of the CAA and the on-going inquiries.

I cannot for one moment put myself in the place of workers who travel to and from oil rigs, but I am sure that at the moment their confidence is not at a level that we would wish it to be at. Lewis Macdonald mentioned that this year marks 25 years since Piper Alpha; when I attended the memorial service at Hazlehead in Aberdeen, I spoke to families who had lost loved ones in that absolutely dreadful tragedy. I remember at the time asking myself, "What rig are my father-in-law and stepfather on?"—I had no idea. In that fleeting moment, one tends to think, "My goodness—I sincerely hope that it's not one of my relatives" on the understanding that it will be someone else's.

Each death, each incident, each accident in the North Sea brings us back to tragedies such as Piper Alpha. One of my constituents was fortunate to be a survivor in one of the recent helicopter incidents, but I cannot imagine the trauma that he must have gone through while trying to escape. Maureen Watt suggested that we understand the feelings and anxieties of workers who might not wish to go offshore until confidence is restored in the industry, and I hope that the industry, with the support of the trade unions, will do everything it can to support them.

Of course, we should also bear in mind not just the workers who go out into the North Sea to keep the oil and gas flowing but the support staff who are out there and their families at home, who must be feeling a great deal of pressure and anxiety. We must respect those who feel such anxiety. There is no doubt that the industry seeks profits and needs to keep the oil and gas flowing but that should never come at the cost of the health and safety of its workers. Much has been done over the years to protect the workers and health and safety have improved immensely, and I sincerely hope that they continue to improve to ensure that we have no more fatal tragedies in the North Sea.

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

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Richard Baker.]

Motion agreed to.

12:59

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I reflected on Richard Baker's motion for this debate

when I flew out of Sumburgh on Tuesday, and accordingly I paid more attention than normal to the safety briefing. I agree with Maureen Watt's observations about how different the helicopter emergency training that some of us have been through is from the reality of what happened when the Super Puma went down on that summer evening, 23 August, 2 miles off Sumburgh Head—in fact there was not much of a swell, relative to the normal swell there. I put on record my gratitude to all of those who were involved in dealing with that accident, onshore and offshore, and I congratulate the members of the emergency services on their professionalism. Indeed, I will meet some of the staff when I go to Sumburgh tonight, and I will thank them personally for what they did.

We need to separate the two points that Richard Baker brought to Parliament's attention today. The first point is his absolutely understandable request that we examine the fatal accident inquiry system. That has to be reformed. It is nothing short of outrageous that four years has gone by since the accident in 2009 and the loved ones and families of those who died then still do not have a definitive account of what went wrong. The system is clearly not working and, therefore, measures that come forward from any party to address that should be supported and actively considered.

The second issue that Richard Baker and others raised is that there are now four inquiries under way. I am not convinced that there should be four separate inquiries. I think that that makes Lewis Macdonald's point. We should be having one definitive public inquiry, led by an appropriate judge or another figure, rather than four separate inquiries. Arguably, having all of those separate inquiries gives not only the trade unions and the workforce, who are desperate for certain knowledge about what happened, but everyone else who has a deep and long-term commitment to the industry a degree of doubt about when all the inquiries will report, how they will interact and what they will mean. I urge the industry and the Governments in London and Edinburgh to think quickly about whether it is advisable to have four separate inquiries going on instead of pulling them all into one, which is what I think should happen.

I am not convinced that the CAA inquiry is all that others believe it to be. The CAA has a central role in investigation and a central role in regulation. Therefore, I am not quite sure how the CAA can also investigate incidents such as the one that happened off Sumburgh on 23 August.

I absolutely take the point that Maureen Watt and others made about the expertise of the Norwegians. That is an entirely relevant point. However, surely that should be addressed by an independent public inquiry rather than by having

one of the bodies, the CAA, which should be giving evidence to an independent public inquiry, acting as the master of the terms of reference for further work. I do not doubt the CAA's commitment, expertise or ability to bring strong recommendations to the table, but it is part of the system, so I do not see quite how it can undertake that work.

The situation is similar with regard to the oil industry's work. I will not be the only member who has talked to Malcolm Webb and others in the industry about what they plan for the helicopter safety steering group and the other reviews. However, it strikes me that the confidence that the industry and the workforce need for the future is best rebuilt via an independent inquiry that will allow the industry to address the issues. BALPA said a lot of pretty relevant things about the inquiries when it expressed its concern over the nature of the CAA inquiry. That needs to be dealt with, and I hope that, in the interests of people's confidence, we will end up with one publicly led inquiry.

13:03

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I, too, thank Richard Baker for bringing this issue to the chamber.

Like others, I have talked before about my friends and family who work offshore. When people from Aberdeen are away from home and hear news of an accident in the industry, people around them are often surprised that their immediate reaction is to head for the nearest phone to ensure that their loved ones are safe. As Dennis Robertson says, it is no consolation to hear that other people have lost loved ones through a tragic accident.

No matter what conclusion we come to at the end of this debate, every member here has played a large role in ensuring that health and safety in the North Sea is as good as it can be. That is particularly true of the members of the cross-party group on oil and gas, who have considered the issues carefully during my time in the Parliament. We have heard from Step Change in Safety, union representatives and the industry about how improvements could be made.

Today, we have heard a little bit about all the inquiries that are under way, about the CAA investigation, with support from the European Aviation Safety Agency and input from Norwegian partners. We have heard about the Air Accidents Investigation Branch and the operators' review, and there has been an appeal today for the FAI process to be speeded up. Tavish Scott called for a public inquiry, which is not in the jurisdiction of this Parliament or Government.

I have a concern about a clutter of inquiries because there are only so many experts who can look at what the failings may actually have been, but is a quick FAI the answer? I have been looking at this situation and at what is said about FAIs. The documentation from the Government and the courts states:

“The purpose of an FAI is to determine:

- Where and when the death took place.
- The cause of the death.
- Reasonable precautions whereby the death might have been avoided.
- The defects, if any, in any system of working which contributed to the death or any accident resulting in the death.
- Any other relevant facts relevant to the circumstances of the death.”

In some respects, a fatal accident inquiry would be in the dark about some of these points because we have not yet concluded what the failings have been.

I have also had a good look at the Cullen review of fatal accident inquiry legislation, which was produced in 2009. I have not gone through the entire document, because it is rather large, but there are some interesting points there.

From my perspective, and in this I agree with Alex Johnstone, we need to see the improved safety standards without a doubt but, to use the words of Lewis Macdonald, who called for “early and effective” FAIs, I do not think that an early FAI would necessarily be an effective one. This is something on which I intend to dwell as we go forward.

13:08

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I add my condolences to those expressed by colleagues to the families who lost loved ones on 23 August, and I recognise the work of the rescue services. I also congratulate my colleague Richard Baker on securing this important debate. Richard’s interest in the conditions faced by workers in the North Sea is extensive and it is fitting that he should lead the debate today.

The motion refers to the draft member’s bill that I have issued for consultation. I would like to outline today why I believe such a bill is necessary and how it is relevant to this tragedy.

I have spoken to people who have lost a loved one in a workplace, or other incident and three things have become clear to me: first, the time it takes to hold a fatal accident inquiry is often far too long; secondly, those families do not feel that they have the level of involvement that they would

like to have in the process of deciding whether a fatal accident inquiry is held; thirdly, when an FAI takes place, the sheriff who conducts it cannot make binding recommendations and the lessons that could be learned from the inquiry are not always applied. Unfortunately, this case demonstrates those points only too well because, as the motion says, this is not the first time a Super Puma helicopter has crashed into the sea, and the families of the 16 people who died in 2009 are still waiting to hear whether there will be an FAI.

Could lessons have been learned from the crash in 2009? I do not know, and none of us can know. What I do know is that, in 1989, a fatal train crash took place at Bellgrove in Glasgow, when two trains collided at a point where two lines converged into one. The cause of that accident was found to be that one of the drivers did not react to a signal warning him of that line convergence. That is a recognised phenomenon in the railway industry and is known as SPAD—signal passed at danger. In that case, the sheriff recommended the simple change of introducing what would in effect be a double signal, on the basis that a driver is less likely to miss two danger signals. However, the recommendation was not implemented. In 1991, the Newton rail disaster occurred, in which four people died and 21 were injured. The principal cause of that tragedy was, again, a signal passed at danger.

The Scottish Government has said on several occasions that it will legislate but, unfortunately, its legislative programme so far has been silent on the issue. That is why I am going ahead with my bill proposal. I ask the minister to consider the bill—he may take the bill, if he will, although he will not necessarily agree with everything in it—and let us have the debate. Let us hear from the families, the trade unions and the industry on what they have to say. The industry understands that delays are detrimental because, for the companies involved, the liability for an incident remains on their books until such time as its cause has been established. The industry also knows the costs, both in terms of personal involvement and in terms of money, that arise from people having to go over again an incident that was a tragedy at the time and remains a tragedy years later.

I realise that ministers have many other priorities, but I say to the minister that I am consulting not just on an idea but on a bill proposal that has already been drafted. I would happily work with the minister, the cabinet secretary and other parties—I welcome Alex Johnstone’s comments in particular—because, at the end of the day, this is not about party politics but about people’s lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must conclude.

Patricia Ferguson: No one should lose their life just because they go to work. We here have the power to make a difference. Let us use it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I can allow only a shorter contribution from Christian Allard.

13:12

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): I add my thanks to Richard Baker for bringing the debate to the chamber. I, too, extend my condolences to the families.

Last week, I heard at first hand from the industry how the relatives of the victims felt after the helicopter disaster in August. I was told that some of those relatives would like to help to make commuting offshore safer. I commend the industry and the unions for the way in which they have engaged with the partners and families of the victims.

Earlier this month, we all listened to the heart-felt statement of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney. I remember the emotion that we felt in the chamber as members spoke thereafter. As members may recall, I made a call then for the relatives of offshore workers to be represented at a senior level in the work of the helicopter safety steering group. The proposal is that the industry should give partners and relatives a voice on the way forward for the industry.

We can all imagine the worry that is experienced by families and relatives as they wait at home for news and wait for their loved ones to return safely from their shift offshore. Parents are worried when their children decide to join the industry. Partners find it difficult to cope with the anxiety when waiting for their loved one's return and to explain to children what could happen.

Like Dennis Robertson, I recall the ceremony in Aberdeen's memorial garden in July, when we remembered the 167 men who lost their lives in the North Sea 25 years ago. Still with the memory of that commemoration in my mind, I went to an early helicopter safety steering group town hall event a few weeks later. The industry, the unions and the workforce were talking about safety procedures to return the EC225 fleet to service. Partners and relatives listened to every word as pilots and offshore workers asked questions. At the end of the morning, someone left the room in tears after others had agreed to the decision to allow the EC225 to fly again. It did not feel right.

Like Patricia Ferguson, I feel that we should leave some space for partners and relatives to

take an active part in any review that takes place. I understand that the industry is not set up to include partners and relatives. One might ask how they could take part at a senior level in the discussions on helicopter safety. I understand that it might be a challenge for the families to organise themselves to be able to participate, but we should do something about it, whatever review we think we should have. Partners and relatives should be at the main table because they are relevant stakeholders and they have a contribution to make. Ensuring that their voice is heard remains a challenge for the industry, the workforce and us all.

13:15

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I thank Richard Baker for bringing this important debate to Parliament and thank all members across all parties who spoke for their speeches. The debate has been sombre, serious, considered and a useful contribution to the debate on a matter that is plainly of huge importance.

I also express my sympathies and condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of all those who lost their lives in the tragic incident. They were Sarah Darnley, Duncan Munro, Gary McCrossan and George Allison. We must always remember that those people lost their lives. The bereaved who survive them will always remember them. Dennis Robertson set out that side of the matter powerfully.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, John Swinney, made a statement to Parliament on Wednesday 4 September in which he outlined the facts of the incident, the tremendous response by the emergency services that resulted in the rescue of 14 survivors and the strong leadership provided by the helicopter safety steering group in taking some difficult and challenging decisions to ensure the safety and confidence of the workforce. I add my thanks to all those who were involved in a tremendous effort, as Tavish Scott—the member for the Shetlands, including Sumburgh—mentioned. We all thank them.

I had some experience of this when, as a member of the Lomond mountain rescue team, I attended a call-out on 1 February 1987 and there was a fatality as a result of a helicopter crash; I note that the late Sergeant Harry Lawrie is still remembered from that day. On that occasion, a Wessex helicopter was involved. Such incidents are sombre occasions, and all those who attend will have the experience etched in their memories.

It is understandable that huge concerns exist. They have been heightened because of the

proximity in time of the helicopter incidents in the North Sea. The one in August was the fifth incident since 2009 and the second involving fatalities.

The five incidents involved two specific types of aircraft: the L2 and the EC225. The EC225 has been subjected to stringent tests and analysis since it was grounded following the incident in October 2012. I understand that, at this point, the helicopter safety steering group regards the EC225 as the safest helicopter available for offshore operations anywhere in the world. We must give credence to that view, given the group's expertise.

It is clear that the helicopter safety steering group will need to work hard in the coming weeks and months to get that message across to the workforce and to help rebuild the confidence of the offshore community, as many members said in the debate. I understand that, in addition to lifting the suspension on the L1 and the EC225, the helicopter safety steering group has also launched a far-reaching communications campaign across the industry to engage with the workforce in an effort to rebuild confidence.

On 5 September, the AAIB issued a special bulletin advising on the initial findings of the investigation in which it stated that, to date, it has uncovered no evidence of a "causal technical failure" in the helicopter. The special bulletin confirmed the earlier report that the preliminary investigation had found that the helicopter was intact when it struck the sea in, as I think Maureen Watt said, an upright position. In addition, analysis of the data recorders found that both engines were delivering power until impact.

On Tuesday, the CAA, which is the UK's specialist aviation regulator, announced a review of offshore helicopter operations in the North Sea. I think that it is relevant to point out that its work is a review, not an inquiry—the CAA does not investigate accidents; the Air Accidents Investigation Branch does that. Following the AAIB's investigation, the CAA, as the regulatory body, would take action, if necessary.

I have read the "Review of Offshore Helicopter Operations Terms of Reference", which outlines the objective and scope of the review, its timescale and the membership of the review team. Lewis Macdonald asked whether specific practical matters, such as the maintenance regime and the rigorousness of it in respect of helicopters, and various other factors would be addressed. The CAA's review will look at a number of issues, but I would be interested to know whether Mr Macdonald considers that all the serious issues that he raised will be covered. Perhaps that is something that we can come back to.

Like Mark McDonald, I welcome the fact that the review will be undertaken jointly with the Norwegian Civil Aviation Authority and the European Aviation Safety Agency and that it will be advised by a panel of independent experts. It will study current operations as well as previous incidents and accidents. In other words, it will not look only at the most recent tragedy.

Richard Baker: I agree with what the minister has said, but would he be willing to engage with my colleague Patricia Ferguson on the issue of fatal accident inquiries, which is central to the motion?

Fergus Ewing: I will come on to that when I have finished my remarks about the CAA's review.

The point that I was seeking to make is that, from my reading of the review's terms of reference, the background to it, its objective and scope, and its timescale, I think that it is a fairly substantial review. We should acknowledge that the people who will be involved include a number of experts and people with huge experience in the industry. If members have any particular suggestions to make about the review and how it could be improved, extended or altered, I would be keen to receive them after the debate.

I turn to the issue of a fatal accident inquiry. Plainly, this is one of those debates in which I am responsible for some matters and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice is responsible for others. The justice secretary is responsible for taking forward the serious issues that have been raised in relation to fatal accident inquiries and the timescale for them. Quite properly, those are matters for the Crown and the Lord Advocate, and not for the Government. The Crown acts independently of the Government, and rightly so. Plainly, that is an important principle.

In relation to the four-year time lapse between the 2009 incident and the FAI, which Mr Baker raised in his motion and which Patricia Ferguson mentioned, the cabinet secretary has made available to Parliament the timeline of the complex investigation involved. The Lord Advocate will publish that on the Crown Office website. It is essential that complex investigations are pursued methodically and are not rushed but are comprehensive and detailed. More than 600 witness statements have been taken and 2,000 documents gathered.

I understand that the consultation on Patricia Ferguson's proposed bill finishes on 22 November. The Scottish Government will consider the final proposals when they are available. Mr MacAskill has already given an undertaking to the Justice Committee that the bill to implement the Cullen recommendations will be introduced in this parliamentary session. I will pass on the *Official*

Report of this debate to Mr MacAskill because I am conscious that, in the time available, I have not been able to answer all the questions that have been raised, and I would like to do that.

I am keen to continue to ensure that the Scottish Government is fully engaged with the oil and gas industry and the trade unions. As it happens, I will meet a number of senior trade union representatives tomorrow—the meeting was arranged some time ago—and we will consider these matters very carefully.

Rebuilding the confidence of the men and women who travel to and from our offshore installations on a daily basis must be a key priority for us all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to Christian Allard for cutting his time; I was advised that the minister had another pressing engagement and had to leave the chamber at 20 past 1.

13:25

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Ryder Cup 2014

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-07808, in the name of Shona Robison, on one year to go until the Ryder cup. I ask members who wish to take part in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. Before I call the minister to speak, I say to members that we will be extremely generous in terms of your speaking times today. We will also be quite generous in terms of scope, so if you want to talk about your favourite golf courses, feel free to do so.

I call Shona Robison. Minister—you have a generous 14 minutes.

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): There is no doubt that the miracle of Medinah in 2012 will be talked about for many years to come. Whether people were cheering for Europe or for America, I think that everyone will agree that the golf was spectacular and that the excitement was almost unbearable at times.

Medinah should—and always will be—remembered for the golf, but when the Ryder cup comes to Scotland in September next year, I want it to be remembered for much more than just the golf. I proposed the timing of the debate to coincide with our “year to go” celebrations, which took place earlier this week. As members may have seen from the media coverage, staging an event of this magnitude presents many opportunities for Scotland, for Scottish businesses, for our tourism industry, for schools and for charities, not to mention our own golfers of all abilities as well as golf fans—of whom, of course, we have many, here in the home of golf. I therefore thank the members who agreed to take part in the debate today—the one and only opportunity for members to discuss the opportunities that are afforded to Scotland by our hosting the Ryder cup next year.

Scotland is, of course, a country with rich traditions and year-round attractions. However, 2014 will be a special year, when we will welcome the world and showcase Scotland’s assets on the global stage. It will not only be the year when the Ryder cup comes back to Scotland for the first time in more than 40 years; 2014 will also see our second year of homecoming, which will be a year-long programme of events and activities to showcase all that is great about Scotland. Another great sporting event will also, of course, take place—the Commonwealth games.

With those important events on the horizon, it is vital not only that Scotland meet the world's expectations, but that we as a Government and as a people use those opportunities to promote Scotland and to demonstrate once more that Scotland is a perfect stage for major events, whether they are sporting, cultural, local or international.

The success of 2014 will rely on a great many people and on many years of planning. The Ryder cup alone has been being planned for since the success of Scotland's bid in 2001 under the leadership of the Rt Hon Henry McLeish. Since I was appointed as Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport in 2011, I have worked closely with Ryder Cup Europe and the Gleneagles hotel as well as VisitScotland, which have led on the planning and preparations for what I am absolutely sure will be the best-ever Ryder cup.

My priority, which I feel very strongly about, is to ensure that any major sporting event that is held in Scotland benefits the people of Scotland. The Ryder cup will do that in many ways; I will touch on some of them today. I am delighted to be able to announce that, in partnership with Ryder Cup Europe, the Scottish Government will be offering up to 50 young people from all over Scotland the opportunity and financial support to volunteer at the 2014 Ryder cup.

As we saw from the Olympics last year, volunteers play a crucial role in the success of major events. The training and experience that will be gained by volunteers is one of the many legacy benefits for individuals and for Scotland as a whole. However, we know that not everyone is in a position to meet the additional costs that are associated with volunteering. Our volunteering support scheme, which will run alongside the wider "Scotland's best" initiative, will mean that up to 50 young people who face financial barriers to volunteering will receive structured training and financial support and, on completion of the training, a qualification that will boost their future volunteering and employment opportunities.

For the Ryder cup, there will be 1,800 volunteers in total from around the world—more than half those volunteers will come from Scotland. They will gain invaluable experience of working at a major event, but the experience that Ryder cup volunteers will gain is only part of the legacy that the 2014 Ryder cup will leave for Scotland.

For children and young people at school, the event will present an opportunity to learn about and to be inspired by golf and the Ryder cup. Earlier this week I joined the European and American Ryder cup captains—which was a pleasure—to launch an education e-resource that is made up of learning and teaching materials that

cover everything from the history of golf to how hospitality and media are delivered at major events. The learning materials, which are in line with curriculum for excellence and were developed by Perth and Kinross Council in partnership with Education Scotland and Stirling Council, are openly available to all and can be used to inspire children from three to 18 years of age.

Through schools, in a once-in-a-lifetime competition, we will give every child and young person in Scotland an opportunity to be part of this exciting event, to learn from the experiences of those who are involved in organising every aspect of the event, and to have better links to getting started with the sport. The education resource has also been developed to have strong links with clubgolf, which is the Scottish Government's junior golf initiative, so that those who are inspired by the 2014 Ryder cup will be able to forge links easily with local golf clubs and existing junior golf programmes.

I want to put on the record my thanks to the Auchterarder community school and its children, who hosted the launch of the education resource this week. They did a fantastic job and the two captains were very inspired by the children and what they saw.

Clubgolf is already a major legacy benefit of the Ryder cup and is an excellent example of how we can benefit from the opportunity that the Ryder cup presents. Since 2003, the Scottish Executive and Scottish Government have committed £500,000 annually to ensure that all children in Scotland are introduced to golf by the time they reach nine years of age. To date, almost 300,000 schoolchildren have been introduced to golf through clubgolf, and we expect that by 2018, 500,000 schoolchildren will have benefited from clubgolf. More than half of new junior golf club members last year joined through the clubgolf pathway, including a higher proportion of girls, which is fantastic.

The vast number of legacy benefits means that there is not enough time to mention them all just now, but I will return to those when we talk about our work with charities later in the debate.

I also take this opportunity to draw members' attention to another golf event that will take place during Ryder cup week. The junior Ryder cup will take place on 22 and 23 September, also in Perthshire, at Blairgowrie golf club at Rosemount. The junior Ryder cup contest is designed to build international friendships between top junior golfers from Europe and the United States, and it features mixed teams of boys and girls who are under 18 years of age. The junior Ryder cup in 2010 was held at Gleneagles and we aim to build on the success of 2010 to get even more children attending. I am sure that this free event, which will

be attended by many local schoolchildren, will inspire young golfers.

In addition to the great legacy benefits, the 2014 Ryder cup will bring great economic benefit. With match-day tickets already heavily oversubscribed—up by 38 per cent on the 2010 event at Celtic Manor in Wales—the 2014 Ryder cup is expected to see 45,000 spectators each day, and around 250,000 over the course of the week. To date, one in three tickets has been purchased by someone in Scotland, but we will have visitors attending from 75 countries, which is more than ever before.

In addition to the spectators, the extra staff who have been employed to build the event infrastructure will be on site from June until November, and many event volunteers are already seeking local accommodation for the week of the event. In total, the local area will play host to an additional 7,000 staff and volunteers during the peak period. That will translate into direct benefits not only to golf tourism but to the wider tourism industry. Although the benefits will be seen specifically across the accommodation sector, they will extend far beyond it to Scottish food and drink suppliers, travel and transport, other tourist attractions and the wide range of businesses that supply the tourism industry.

Encouraging our international and domestic visitors to take the opportunity, in attending the Ryder cup, to extend their visit to Scotland and see the great assets that we have to offer will be key to maximising the benefits from the event. Whether that involves their seeing more of Scotland's amazing natural environment, visiting our great cities or playing some of the hundreds of other great golf courses in Scotland, we want to ensure that we seize the opportunity to showcase Scotland at its best. To that end, VisitScotland is scaling up its existing golf tourism marketing campaigns to use the Ryder cup to promote Scotland as the home of golf, in key domestic and international markets.

The Ryder cup will offer opportunities to drive increased inward investment. To achieve that, a business engagement programme is being prepared that will target senior business events and tourism contacts. In addition, we have worked with Ryder Cup Europe to ensure that procurement contracts are advertised to all Scottish companies through public contracts Scotland, the public sector procurement portal. That is the first time in Ryder cup history that such an approach has been taken, and it ensures that the event's procurement opportunities are communicated to Scottish companies, which can then bid for contracts.

Another lasting legacy benefit of the Ryder cup is improved public transport access and amenities

for communities in Perth and Kinross. Gleneagles rail station will play a crucial role in the transport plan for next year's event, so in order to ensure that visitors receive the best possible welcome, and to leave a lasting legacy for the people of Perthshire, the station will be upgraded with a number of improvement works ahead of September next year. From the images, it looks absolutely amazing. The plans include a new link road to the station to improve safety and access, increased car parking, installation of new lifts to improve platform access, and refurbishment and reopening of waiting rooms and toilet facilities.

I am aware that some media attention has been given to the impact of the event on local residents and businesses and, in particular, to the local transport plans. I want to offer reassurance to members and constituents on two points. First, there is on-going engagement with local communities. Only last week, a series of community forums took place in several locations, which provided people with the opportunity to meet the event organisers and discuss any issues. Secondly, I offer reassurance that concerns are being listened to and addressed.

Members will appreciate the planning that is required for an event of such scale, and that complex risks are involved in moving large numbers of people safely to and from event venues. Transport planning for the Ryder cup is no exception and has been on-going for some time. Ryder Cup Europe, Transport Scotland, ScotRail, Police Scotland, local councils and others are engaged in a multi-agency approach to ensure that the transport plan for the 2014 Ryder cup is not only designed for the Ryder cup spectator, but will ensure the least possible disruption to local residents who might not wish to be part of the event but who want to go about their daily business.

As a result of concerns that have been raised, local residents and businesses have received information about special transport arrangements that will, without compromising the safety and security of the event, ensure that they will not be inconvenienced.

The face-to-face engagement process is on-going, with another set of forums planned for next year, and there will be other communications, such as targeted newsletters, to fill the gaps in between. In addition, anyone can visit the Perth and Kinross Council website for information, or speak to the dedicated Police Scotland Ryder cup community liaison officer. I pay tribute to Perth and Kinross Council, which has been extremely helpful and has taken the opportunity to make the most of the Ryder cup coming to its area.

I look forward to hearing members' views during the debate, which is perhaps an opportunity for

members to highlight some of the legacy benefits and what is going on in their areas. I am happy to accept the Labour amendment, because we really do not want to divide on such an issue if we can avoid it.

I move,

That the Parliament notes Scotland's preparedness for the 2014 Ryder Cup, which will take place in one year's time; commits to supporting a lasting legacy in terms of education, volunteering, infrastructure, tourism and sport; notes the initiative from the Scottish Government and previous Scottish administrations for the successful bid and the investment in Clubgolf and golf tournaments, and believes that such cross-party and cross-administration support firmly sets Scotland as the home of golf.

14:44

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I think that this is the first time that a Parliament debate on golf will not be graced by the knowledge and passion of our late colleague David McLetchie. David's enthusiasm for golf and skill in playing were well known—especially to those who sometimes competed against him. I was, unfortunately, not able to be present when Parliament paid tribute to him, so today I express my regret at his passing and offer my condolences to his family and his many friends, particularly those on the Conservative benches.

This time next year, Scotland will be in a state of high excitement as we watch the enthralling competition that is the Ryder cup. I watched with interest this week the events that took place to recognise and publicise the competition, with one year to go. I am sure that the minister found those to be an interesting experience. Who says that being the sports minister is not the best job in Government?

Colleagues will recall the thrilling finale to the 2012 Ryder cup, when Europe defeated the United States by 14 and a half points to 13 and a half points—an outcome that has set the stage beautifully for 2014. As the motion points out, Scotland is “the home of golf”, and it is fitting that the tournament will return to this country next year, having not been played in Scotland since 1973. That competition was, of course, played at Muirfield and was won by the USA with a score of 19 points to 13.

Until 1973, the teams that took part were the USA and Great Britain. Although Northern Irish players had taken part since 1947 and Republic of Ireland players since 1953, it was only in 1973 that the team name was changed to Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Presiding Officer and colleagues may notice that I had anticipated that I might have longer to speak than I originally thought I would have.

For those with an interest in golf, being able to attend the Ryder cup on home soil will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. However, for all those with a love of sport it will be the culmination of a very special year that will be full of excitement and opportunity, and—if it is anything like Medinah—high drama, too.

As we have heard, clubgolf was established as part of the legacy of the Ryder cup and as a major component of the bid. It is a real opportunity for young people to have the chance to experience golf and, one hopes, to develop a love of the game that they will take with them into their later lives. All 32 local authorities are—to their credit—now involved, and some 73 per cent of primary schools are involved, which is excellent news. If I have one criticism, it is that I would be interested to hear what we can do to encourage the other 27 per cent of schools that do not seem to be involved to become involved and to take that opportunity for their school community.

It is particularly good to hear about the number of girls who are becoming involved in golf. We all know—we have debated it in the chamber before—the difficulty that exists in encouraging young women and girls to remain involved in sport. At a time when we are recognising that challenge, and when the women's game is becoming so professional and so strong, it seems to be appropriate for us to reflect on the fact that girls are becoming more involved in golf than was perhaps the case previously.

I was interested to note that Ted Bishop, the president of the Professional Golfers' Association in America, has indicated that he is envious of clubgolf. I think that he was right when he said:

“in 10, 15, 20 years from now, Scotland will have a Ryder Cup player that was part of this”

—“this”, of course, being clubgolf.

I was pleased to hear of the opportunities to attend Ryder cup practice days and the junior Ryder cup, as well as the other events in which many clubgolf players are taking part. I was also pleased that the Ryder cup organisers have been very supportive of the project. I recalled visiting the open championship a few years ago and hearing some of the players talking about clubgolf in extremely glowing terms.

It was absolutely correct for the First Minister to attend the Ryder cup last year; I would have expected him to be there to support the European team and to encourage people to come to Scotland in 2014. However, the part that I really cannot accept is that it cost £460,000 for him to do so. That is, after all, only a little less than clubgolf costs for one year. In my view, paring down the costs of that trip and spending a little more money

on clubgolf would have struck a better balance, but I will leave that where it stands.

According to experience and research, the more sports a person tries out when he or she is young, the more likely he or she is to continue playing at least one of them into adulthood, so clubgolf also makes an important contribution to our healthy living agenda. Of course, clubgolf does not simply happen; it requires volunteers—parents and teachers—to encourage young people to become involved, and the active schools network is vital to making clubgolf a success and making links with local golf clubs possible.

In the recent past, golf enthusiasts would often tell of the length of time they had wait to join their local club and often measured their club's prestige in terms of the years they had to wait to join. However, long waiting times do not seem to be such a feature of today's golf club scene; indeed, evidence suggests that golf club membership has declined in recent years; my colleague Neil Findlay will say more about that in his speech. That is why Scottish Labour's amendment suggests that the Ryder cup should be a catalyst to encourage players of all ages to take up the game and join a club, so I hope that the minister will be able to tell us a bit more about how the Scottish Government and its agencies plan to harness the great deal of enthusiasm that I hope will be generated next year to achieve that aim.

In my constituency, local people led by John McVicar organised and campaigned to bring a former municipal golf course back into use, and a couple of years ago successfully opened up the nine-hole Ruchill golf course. Such projects are very important to the local communities, but they need support and encouragement, which is where they tend to struggle. Funding to start such projects can be found quite readily, but finding the money that will enable them to keep going is a harder ask.

Although we on this side of the chamber welcome the Scottish Government's sentiments about the Ryder cup's potential legacy, we also have a number of concerns. Progress towards the 50 per cent tourism target has to date been a little disappointing, and although the Ryder cup and the Commonwealth games will undoubtedly increase the 2014 figures, there is no real guarantee that the 50 per cent target will be hit or that next year's growth will be maintained in subsequent years. I know that earlier this month the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism launched a new golf tourism strategy that aims to capitalise on next year's events and the open championships in 2015 and 2016, but as far as tourism planning is concerned it seems to have come a little too late. After all, tour operators from the countries that we

want to encourage to bring sportsmen and sportswomen here plan quite far ahead.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Does Patricia Ferguson share my view that the best way of boosting tourism numbers in Scotland is to secure a cut in VAT on tourism? In Ireland, for example, a cut to 9 per cent is reckoned to have generated 10,000 jobs, 7,000 of which were directly in the tourism sector.

Patricia Ferguson: I am sure that Graeme Dey is aware that a debate about VAT and taxation on tourism has been going on for a number of years in Scotland, but regardless of that element of tourism costs, the fact is that tourism in Scotland is an expensive and labour-intensive business with a lot of on-costs. As I understand it, the aim of tourism in Scotland has not been to get to the bottom but to drive up quality. That is the direction of travel that we should go in, and I know that it is the direction in which VisitScotland and others want to take us. However, there is an interesting debate to be had on the subject, not least in terms of the fact that a number of countries charge tourists but not residents for goods and services. That approach seems to be very popular in other countries and I have certainly heard it suggested for our own. We could spend an entire day debating that.

I am still a bit concerned that a charge is to be levied on each volunteer, because it not only limits the number of people who can apply but is somewhat of a contradiction in terms. We have been told that the charge will root out "time wasters", which I thought was an unfortunate choice of expression, and I note that such a move was not necessary for the Commonwealth games, for which there were 50,000 applicants for volunteering places. That said, I very much welcome the minister's announcement, which I think will go some way to ensuring that young people have the opportunity to take part in the Ryder cup.

Shona Robison: I should make sure that Patricia Ferguson understands that the charge is not something that has been introduced for the Ryder cup in Gleneagles next year; it has always been the case that there has been a charge to recover the cost of volunteers' kit at Ryder cup events. Of course, the volunteers are guaranteed time on the course. Furthermore, the package will cost a lot less than was charged in Medinah, where the registration fee was around £160, compared to £75 this year.

Patricia Ferguson: I understand that the charge was introduced after the Welsh event, but I will stand corrected if I am wrong about that. I will say that kit is being provided for those who volunteer at the Commonwealth games, and there is not going to be a charge for that. We need to be

quite careful about that element. However, as I said, I genuinely welcome the minister's announcement today.

Scottish Labour sees sport as having the potential to change lives and to inspire and motivate us all. We also believe that sport brings nations together, and we want to amend the Government's motion so that it says that. Human beings can function well on their own, but for many people being part of a team is a fulfilling and rewarding experience. Our home-grown golfers certainly seem to have thrived in recent years and they have been part of a European team at the Ryder cup—proud Scots, working with others and pooling their talent to achieve a victory that we all want.

I have no doubt that Scotland is well prepared to host next year's Ryder cup, and I believe that it will be an epic spectacle that will help to cement Scotland's place as a sporting nation. However, it is an expensive event to host, and we must ensure that all the goals in the Scottish Government motion and our amendment are achieved, if it is to be more than just a great spectacle.

I move amendment S4M-07808.1, to leave out from second "notes" to end, and insert,

"believes that the Ryder Cup should be used as a catalyst for increasing participation in the sport by all age groups; notes the initiative from the Scottish Government and previous Scottish administrations for the successful bid and the investment in Clubgolf and golf tournaments; believes that such cross-party and cross-administration support firmly sets Scotland as the home of golf, and considers that the Ryder Cup is an excellent example of the way in which sport brings nations together."

14:56

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the minister's remarks and her announcement. I also thank Patricia Ferguson for her kind remarks about our late colleague, David McLetchie. The last time that I saw David before his death, we talked a great deal about 2014, and it was clear to me that the most important event of that year for him was the Ryder cup. I was only on the golf course once with him, and it was obvious not only that he was a very fine golfer but that he played with the same commitment, enthusiasm and good humour that he had always shown in politics. I am sure that David McLetchie would have been keen on this debate, and I know for a fact that he would have probably been there for the whole week of the Ryder cup next summer.

I am one of few members of this Parliament who live just 7 or 8 miles from the 18th hole at Gleneagles. Along with those colleagues, I have witnessed the growing excitement at the fact that Strathearn and Perthshire will be holding such a world-class golf tournament—indeed, it is one of

the world's most elite sporting events and draws attention from all around the world. It is the first time in more than 40 years that this prestigious tournament will be in Scotland. Given the intense competition that there is among many other nations to host the event, it is likely that it will be some time before it happens again in Scotland, so, for most of us, it is quite simply a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I want to touch on three aspects of our holding the Ryder cup, all of which, obviously, have particular relevance to people in Perth and Kinross. The first concerns the logistics of the event. I was one of the people who attended a local community briefing on Thursday in Auchterarder—in the same community centre that the minister was in on Tuesday. That meeting was with the Ryder cup management team, and I have to say that I was very impressed by the work that is already under way to plan for the event—safety being paramount, as the minister rightly says.

Obviously, Strathearn is used to hosting such high-profile events, whether on the grander scale, such as the G8 conference, or on the scale of the Johnnie Walker golf tournament. However, even with that experience behind it, there are significant challenges.

The forward planning has been extremely impressive, and I welcome the steps that are being taken to communicate fully with local residents about what is happening. Nevertheless, there are some tricky issues with regard to changes to things such as the local road network. In some cases, the arrangements will be different from the arrangements that were in place for previous events, and there are therefore challenges with regard to access to businesses and vital services, as well as the usual challenges around crowd control.

As the Ryder cup management team said, we should never underestimate the logistical challenges of such an event. We must be mindful of the fact that a large section of the population will not be particularly keen on having the Ryder cup. I happen to disagree with them, but there is a group in the population who do not see it as the most important thing that could happen in their area. It is, therefore, important to keep all local residents at the heart of the planning.

The second issue is the economic benefit of hosting the tournament. The primary reason for golf tourists to come here is that Scotland is the home of golf, but we should not underestimate the number who come as a result of business and related sporting interests, many of whom will go much further afield than Strathearn. There is an excellent opportunity to increase the £220 million a year that comes from the sport.

A few weeks ago, the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism launched the first national strategy for golf tourism, “Driving Forward Together”, which aims to capitalise on the staging of the Ryder cup and the open championship to confirm Scotland as the world’s leading golf destination. That strategy, like other growth strategies, has been developed to build on the strong foundations of activity by the industry’s governing bodies and the public sector. The hope is that, as a result of the strategy’s implementation, the £220 million that currently comes to the Scottish economy will rise to somewhere in the region of £300 million by 2020.

Scotland is already competing well internationally according to the league tables, if I can call them that, of golf tourism hotspots for the future. There is reason to believe that the strategy can make a big difference to the tourism industry but, alongside that, concrete steps need to be taken. As we see from other Government strategies—I put no political colours on this—it is often difficult to live up to the targets that are set, particularly over a longer period of time.

We know that 2012 was a challenging year for Scotland’s tourism, and not just because of the appalling summer weather that we had. However, 2013 has produced much more optimism, which can only be good. People are in a more optimistic mood about what we can deliver, and that will be relevant when it comes to attracting a wider group of people to the Ryder cup. I was intrigued by the statistics that show that groups such as the Germans and the French are starting to return to Scotland, as those tourist groups had previously been in a bit of a decline. That is healthy news for the Ryder cup.

The opportunity to host the Ryder cup, which will be viewed by millions of people around the world, provides one of the best advertising opportunities that we could hope to have—far better than anything else—but, as the minister said, that needs to be articulated with the Commonwealth games strategy and strategies that are designed to assist business development for small and medium-sized businesses, which have had a much more difficult time of it. Some of the initiatives are first class, but we must ensure that that assistance is delivered in the longer term.

The third issue, which is important although much less well defined, is the potential sporting legacy of the Ryder cup. That is hinted at by Patricia Ferguson in the Labour amendment, which we are happy to support alongside the Government’s motion.

Two years ago, the First Minister said:

“Encouraging the next generation of golfers is crucial. Club golf gives thousands of children in Scotland the chance to play golf, putting a club in the hands of every

nine-year-old in the country and creating the possibility of golfing success at the highest levels.”

The First Minister was absolutely right about that, but let us not be in any doubt about the fact that golf is an expensive sport and is not the easiest sport to attract youngsters to play. We should take a lesson from the “Scottish Golf Strategy”, which was put together by the Scottish Golf Union and the Scottish Ladies’ Golfing Association. Their analysis makes it clear that golf has suffered a lot from declining club membership. Lots of golf clubs around Scotland are not doing particularly well. When we talk about bringing youngsters into golf, we must be conscious of the fact that although they can be supported by club golf, they can face substantial fees when they go into adult golf. I entirely agree with Patricia Ferguson that this is about people not just tasting different sports, but trying to have a longer affiliation with a sport that can provide a longer-lasting benefit.

As the minister mentioned, she attended the launch of the Auchterarder primary school Ryder cup initiative earlier in the week. I entirely agree with her that the school and the children there have been absolutely superb in what they have achieved, and Perth and Kinross Council has done much to help with that.

The Scottish Conservatives warmly welcomed the £2 million of investment in Scotland’s junior golf programme, so it was good to see on Tuesday—and in the press since then—that children can become involved in golf in different ways beyond just playing the game. In trying to attract more youngsters to the sport and increase the percentage involved in school golf, we need to accept that not many schools actually have a golf section, so it will be up to the clubs to make this work. There is a message there about the numbers who can be involved and about the potential cost.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You might wish to consider drawing to a close.

Liz Smith: The Ryder cup is a very special tournament and a very special opportunity for the whole of Scotland. We are delighted to support the Government’s motion and the amendment in Patricia Ferguson’s name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate.

15:06

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): First, I thank the Presiding Officer for excusing me from the rest of the debate. I apologise to the chamber—I have an external event to attend.

Perhaps I could tee off my contribution—

Members: Oh!

Dennis Robertson: Oh dear.

I tee off by declaring that I am not a golfer, although many people with a visual impairment play golf.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Over the past few years, I have attended the Scottish Disability Golf Partnership events. At the most recent event, I played with a golfer who was blind, and it was one of the best experiences that I have had on a golf course. His putting was absolutely fantastic, so I encourage Mr Robertson to take up golf.

Dennis Robertson: My experience of being on a putting green with my brother was that I was always sure that he was taking the best ball, because I had no idea where mine was. Perhaps that says more about my brother than it does about my putting.

I am also grateful to the Presiding Officer for the suggestion that we could widen the scope of the debate. Therefore, if the Presiding Officer will allow me, I will focus on some other aspects—

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): Before the member widens the fairway, perhaps I can add to what Mr Findlay said. I, too, have had the pleasure of playing with a blind golfer. When he teed off, he asked, “John, how far have I hit that?” I said, “How far do you want it to be?”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps Mr Robertson can now come to the point.

Dennis Robertson: As well as attending the open earlier this year, I had the great fortune of attending the British blind golf tournament, where I met many a person—with a range of disabilities, actually—who I am sure enjoyed the game. They were much more enthusiastic than I would be in taking up the game.

In widening the scope of the debate, I want to mention that 2014 is an important year for Scotland. As we all know, 2014 is the year of homecoming, the year of the Commonwealth games, the year of the world sheepdog trials—for the first time, they will be held in Scotland, in Tain—and the year of the referendum. Of course, it will also be the year of the Ryder cup. Just before the Ryder cup takes place, perhaps history will be written and, with the will of the people, the Ryder cup will be played in an independent Scotland for the first time.

The Ryder cup and the other events that will come to Scotland next year will bring massive opportunities. We should open the doors to the vast areas that we have in Scotland. My constituency has 12 castles and one palace—that being Balmoral. I am not quite sure whether Her

Majesty Queen Elizabeth knows that I am the MSP for the area, but the palace is in my constituency.

There are many opportunities for people to come prior to the Ryder cup and stay on after it to enjoy Scotland at its best. I am sure that, even during the Ryder cup, there will be golf widows and, perhaps, golf widowers. Why do they not take up the opportunity of visiting not only Scotland's cities but many of our towns and villages, which will be able to offer our finest food and drink? In my constituency, we also have three distilleries—three fine distilleries, in fact.

The opportunities of, and the legacy from, the Ryder cup will be immense. Our transport infrastructure is benefiting by being upgraded for the Ryder cup. Our railway stations are an example. Aberdeen station—the closest to my constituency—will have free wi-fi facilities for the first time. That is, basically, a legacy from the Ryder cup.

Perhaps not so closely attached to the Ryder cup itself but still a legacy from it are the four charities that will benefit from it. In particular, Barnardo's has said that young people could take the aspiration, spirit and ethos behind the Ryder cup—the inspiration behind the sport—in order to achieve. The coaching for life programme is the backbone of Quarriers at the moment.

Basically, the charities are saying that we should give our less-fortunate young people an opportunity. Let us embrace the spirit that will be around in the Ryder cup and give our young children, some of whom are less fortunate than others, an opportunity to reach their goals and to achieve their aspirations. That might not be to play golf; it might be to have a roof over their head or just to belong to a family.

We should not lose sight of the benefits that the Ryder cup will bring to the wider areas of Scotland and to those charities.

I welcome the minister's announcement about the 50 volunteers who will be supported. Through Skills Development Scotland, perhaps they will achieve their goals. Volunteering will have no financial implications for them; they will be supported throughout and will gain a qualification. Who knows where that might lead them in the future? It might lead them into golf—perhaps working in a golf club—or just into tourism and hospitality, but at least they will be given the opportunity that comes with being part of the Ryder cup agenda and part of the spirit of the Ryder cup.

In 2012, it was said that the European team's achievement was a miracle. It was not a miracle but was achieved through hard work, sheer effort and belief. We should take forward that spirit of

sheer effort and belief for 2014. Regardless of who wins, Scotland will be a winner. We will have the legacy. We will have brought the Ryder cup, as well as other organisations and agencies, here. Most of all, we will have had people coming from 75 countries to enjoy Scotland's hospitality. I say to them: the door is open—please come to visit Scotland and see what we can offer.

15:15

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I begin with an admission: not once have I held a golf club on a course and played the game.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Shame.

Graeme Pearson: Indeed, I take the view that, as Mark Twain said,

"Golf is a good walk spoiled."

Winston Churchill followed up on that by saying:

"Golf is a game whose aim is to hit a very small ball into an even smaller hole, with weapons singularly ill-designed for the purpose."

In my earlier life as a police officer, the first knowledge that I had of golf clubs was as the weapons of young men who went out for the occasional gang fight of a Saturday night. Therefore, I am ill prepared to speak on the subject of the Ryder cup.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The quotation,

"Golf is a good walk spoiled",

is often attributed to Mark Twain, but it is, in fact, a remark that Harry Leon Wilson made in 1904 about lawn tennis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Inimitable.

Graeme Pearson: I am obliged to the member. It is good to know that he was about at the time to hear that personally.

Many years ago it was a duty of mine to attend Turnberry on the day that Tom Watson won the open. At first hand, I was exposed to the glamour of the event, the excitement of the day, the adulation of the crowd and the impact on Ayrshire, which forms part of the area that I represent—the south of Scotland. On the back of that experience, I am not a complete philistine when it comes to the subject of golf.

For the information of members in the chamber, the Ryder cup first became known as such in 1927. It is great to know that it was an Englishman—a man from St Albans—who paid the 100 guineas so that the Ryder cup could be purchased for the purpose and the event could take place. I am sure that Scottish National Party members will forgive me for saying that one of the

benefits of belonging to a United Kingdom is that our colleagues from across the home nations can come together in a sportsmanlike fashion.

There are four main issues that I want to raise in connection with the Ryder cup. First, it will provide a wonderful shop window for Scotland as an experience. The warmth of our people, the generosity of our communities and the culture that is Scotland are memorable for many folk who come to our land for such events. Over the decades, I have witnessed at first hand how people have come to Scotland for such events and gone away with a wonderful view of what Scotland is and what our people represent. Such investment in our world relationships is invaluable.

The Ryder cup will allow people to enjoy at first hand our environment and our clean air, to see the sights of our hills, mountains and lochs, and to experience the sheer peace that our country offers, which we too often take for granted. They will be exposed to our culture, our music and the gifts that our people bring with them from their experience and background.

Secondly, the Ryder cup will encourage tourism and investment in it, as Dennis Robertson mentioned. On the back of that, it will create the opportunity for business links and partnerships to be built for the future, and for investment to be made where it is needed most—in our landward areas, which will be able to attract blue riband tourism events in future. We can hope that the people who come for the Ryder cup will come back and bring their friends with them.

The third and, for me, most important aspect of the Ryder cup is that it will allow the development of education for our young people who will be exposed—in a way that I was not—to the experience of golf at first hand. They will be exposed to knowledge about what golf can do for them—for their energy and their completeness of balance in life experience. That will build in them health and a requirement to participate in activities in the open air.

The least advantaged children should be given that opportunity. I hope that the minister will say how we can encourage children who do not get the opportunity to go to golf courses and do not see golf as being for them, because they are the very people who need the experience and should be developed further. They should develop a taste for sport in the round; I hope not only that they would take pleasure in the game of golf but that it would introduce them to other games and sports. That creates the opportunity to develop the child as a whole.

Finally, with Government promotion the Ryder cup will benefit the south of Scotland. One hopes that the Government will promote the many

courses across the south of Scotland. They are first-class courses that nobody ever hears about but which one stumbles into on tours around the country. When our visitors—particularly our American and Chinese visitors—go to those courses, they see them as the jewels in the crown. We need to laud that.

The Ryder cup will provide experience for the emergency services—for police, ambulance and local authority staff and many others—in how to deal with major events. That experience becomes invaluable when we face disaster and challenges that are less palatable.

The volunteering scheme is to be lauded, but the worry about sponsorship is genuine. I hope that those in the private sector who know about sponsorship will come forward to sponsor even more people to play a part in volunteering.

Financing for the coaching for life programme, which enables Quarriers to give young people a second chance in life, will be a wonderful outcome of the Ryder cup.

I hope that all the golfers will enjoy the experience with wonderful gusto; I might catch sight of it on the television occasionally. I only hope that Scotland benefits to the extent that all of us wish it to. If we can spend our lives in sport instead of unemployment and other downbeat ways, Scotland will be a wonderful place in the 21st century. I wish the minister well in promoting all aspects of the Ryder cup, and I support the motion and the amendment.

15:22

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): As a resident of Comrie in Strathearn, I am pleased to contribute to this debate on the Ryder cup, which is to be held at Gleneagles golf course next year.

The debate is turning into quite the confessional. I, too, am not exactly well known for my golfing skills, although I say in my defence that I was quite the putter in the Queen's Park putting green that was opposite the tenement in Glasgow that I grew up in. However, I know how important golf is to the local economy in Strathearn, in wider Perth and Kinross, in the kingdom of Fife and throughout Scotland.

I very much welcome the minister's announcement that the Scottish Government will ensure that up to 50 young Scots receive help and training to volunteer at next year's Ryder cup. That is an excellent initiative, and it is part and parcel of the package of Ryder cup measures and activities to involve young people and other people in volunteering and to maximise the opportunities for Scotland.

For locals and tourists alike, golf is a star attraction, and the excitement is mounting locally at the tantalising prospect of the 2014 Ryder cup, which will be held a mere 16 miles away from Comrie. I very much welcome the confirmation that shuttle buses will run between Crieff and Gleneagles via Auchterarder. It is fair to say that the concern had been expressed that locals and fans alike in Strathearn would have to go to the park-and-ride facilities in Perth, Stirling or Kinross, so it is good news that all the organisations and agencies that are involved in the comprehensive planning project for this fantastic event have factored in such local concerns.

The arrangements for the shuttle buses demonstrate the organisers' determination to facilitate local access during the competition and to promote local businesses, which is important. Specifically, those who will use the shuttle buses will need to demonstrate that they are local residents or that they have stayed overnight with a local accommodation provider. That is very welcome, and it provides a real fillip to local hotels, bed and breakfasts, chalets, lodges and other providers of tourist accommodation.

Indeed, I have seen that the marketing of local facilities is already well under way, with the prospect of transportation to the shuttle buses being laid on by tourist providers. I noted that, further to recent marketing by a provider of lodges in Comrie, in addition to free transport to Crieff complimentary rounds of golf are being offered at local courses such as those at Crieff and Comrie. That is an excellent initiative that shows how everything can pull together, with all of us acting together to get the most out of the experience. I imagine that at other courses in Strathearn, such as those in St Fillans, Muthill and Auchterarder, there will be the same enthusiasm to see what they can do to maximise opportunities, and I feel sure that that enthusiasm will be replicated across Mid Scotland and Fife and, I hope, beyond.

On local transport, it is of course very welcome that Gleneagles train station is to be significantly upgraded. We heard about the detail of that refurbishment from the minister. That is a very welcome local legacy of the Ryder cup.

Another key local transport issue is that trains are to stop at Dunblane. For those who are based a wee bit further south in Strathearn or who are staying in tourist accommodation to the south, that is very welcome, and it was warmly received locally.

As far as Auchterarder residents and businesses and those in the immediate vicinity are concerned, community engagement is on-going on local access, as there are key issues to be addressed. The on-going dialogue that has been referred to is vital to ensure that locally in

Strathearn we can all enjoy the event and maximise the tremendous opportunities that are involved while ensuring that life can continue as normal or as normally as it possibly can.

The availability of updated information is crucial for the local community and fans alike. I am pleased to note that Perth and Kinross Council has created a dedicated website for the Ryder cup. There is a facility on that website to sign up for email information alerts. I am happy to have taken up that opportunity, so I expect soon to become perhaps a bit of an expert on the detail of the golfing activities, which I am not at this point.

I understand that traffic Scotland will play a key role on information updates, which will be important to ensure that all of us can move about. That is all very good news, and it paves the way for what will be a remarkable week in Strathearn and beyond.

The important issue of the legacy of hosting the Ryder cup has been referred to, and it has to be mentioned. In the minute or so that is left to me, I wish to highlight two other key aspects of the Ryder cup and what its legacy will mean.

The first is that the official charities comprise not only the excellent Quarriers charity, which has been mentioned, but Friends of St Margaret's. St Margaret's community hospital is in Auchterarder. The group recently set up its own website, and it is looking forward to the ballot. I understand that it will receive an allocation of tickets that it will be able to auction to raise money for local fundraising activities.

Perth & Kinross Disability Sport is also to be an official charity. That organisation works closely with Perth and Kinross Council and a number of local groups to develop sport for people of all ages and abilities.

The fact that two local charities are involved is very important to ensure that the benefits of the cup are secured, given that an element of disruption will be involved.

The other legacy element that I will mention is the 2014 Ryder cup education resource. As we have heard, it is to be made available to all pupils and teachers in Scotland and is to be linked with the excellent clubgolf initiative, which has been widely praised by, among others, Mr Ted Bishop, who is the president of the PGA of America. It is the innovation involved that will be the mark of success of the educational tool.

The 2014 Ryder cup is a truly massive fixture, not only for our sporting calendar but for Scotland as a whole. The interest and substantial benefit to be derived extend well beyond the world of golf, albeit that it is the fact that Scotland is the home of golf that ensures that the spotlight of the world will

be upon us when we welcome back the Ryder cup.

15:30

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I apologise as I will have to leave before the end of the debate, because I have to get home to Shetland tonight, although not, I hasten to add, to play golf—I will do that on Sunday morning.

I join one or two colleagues in recognising that, as Patricia Ferguson said, this is the first time since 1999 that we are having a debate on golf without David McLetchie, so there is a big hole on the Conservative benches. All of us who are golfing aficionados certainly miss him—probably not for the politics but certainly for the golf. David would have revelled in a recollection of the annual match between MSPs and the press, which a number of us, including Neil Findlay, Chic Brodie and others have played in over the years.

Neil Findlay will have noticed that Tom Watson said the other day that he would rather that there were no picks at all for the Ryder cup team. He thought that the “purest form” of the cup would be to have the top 12 Americans playing in the rankings as the American team. Heaven help us if that principle is applied to the MSP team when we play the press.

I thank the minister for her speech and for what she said about the development of golf for youngsters—boys and girls. The motion is entirely supportable, as is the Labour amendment. The important point is that policy in relation to hosting the Ryder cup and clubgolf survived a change in Administration. That does not happen to all policies, by any stretch of the imagination. It is entirely to the Government's credit that it rightly carried on with the programmes and approach to the Ryder cup in such a positive spirit.

This is the home of golf, so it is right to debate what golf can provide, not just to England, Wales and Northern Ireland but to the wider golfing world.

There was a big debate about whether Gleneagles is the right course for the Ryder cup. The purists might say that it should be played on a links golf course, given that that is the epitome of Scottish golf. However, money talks and Gleneagles is the venue—and it will be fantastic.

I have to say that my grandfather was a member at the king's course, and he would have much preferred that course to be used than the Jack Nicklaus-designed centenary course. I confess that I am a traditionalist, and I think that the king's course knocks the socks off the centenary course. However, I am not the person who makes the decisions—nor can I hit the balls as far as the pros can, by any stretch of the imagination, which is

why they play golf courses of 7,500 yards instead of the rather shorter king's course.

A number of members mentioned tickets, but we did not get into the detail of the issue. I would love to attend, but like thousands of other golf fans in Scotland I will be watching on telly, because I never made it past the ballot. I would be interested to know how many Scots got tickets to watch the event. There will be a huge amount of corporate attendance and a huge number of people from all over the world, but how many ordinary Scottish fans will be there? In my home club in Shetland, I know only two people who got a ticket, and I wonder how many Scots got through the ballot.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Tavish Scott made an important point. People were barred from even getting to the ballot stage, because they had to provide a photograph first, and if they wanted to make two, three or four applications they needed to register individual pictures for each one. That meant that people were barred from even registering, let alone getting to the ballot stage. The issue should have been addressed at an early stage.

Tavish Scott: I honestly do not know the answer to that. I think most of us who are golf fans would frankly have done anything to have the chance of getting a ticket. The fact that we did not get one is just in the nature of the game.

On the Ryder cup itself, American success in Gleneagles next year—as opposed to the astonishing events in Medina last year—will be down to Tom Watson. He is seen by most golf fans across the UK as an honorary Scot. He has won the open championship here many more times than we can imagine. For anyone who has walked around with him—as I and many other Scots did in 2009 when he darn near won the open at Turnberry—I suspect that he is not so much the secret weapon of the United States team as a pretty obvious Exocet missile that they will fire at team Europe. Paul McGinley and his colleagues will have to be absolutely on their metal, and not just when it comes to playing golf, bearing in mind Tom Watson's utter class and style in terms of how he conducts himself around a golf course.

That is at the heart of what the Ryder cup is all about. It is of course a team competition. As we have seen on many occasions, many of our players on the European side revel in the team experience. They might not win majors—Colin Montgomerie is the obvious example, but my goodness me he is the ultimate in team players, although Ian Poulter has rather taken over that mantle.

I was lucky enough to be at the Walker cup in New York a couple of weeks ago.

Stewart Stevenson: I just want to defend Colin Montgomerie slightly. I think that he has won 40 major tournaments, so I do not think that we should downplay his achievements too much.

Tavish Scott: He might have won 40 major tournaments, but he has not won a major. Colin Montgomerie has said himself—I have seen him say it on television many times—that the mark of a world-class player, rather than just an excellent player, is winning a major, as the example of Darren Clarke and a number of other leading players from these shores illustrates. I wish that Colin Montgomerie had won a major. He had two or three chances. I could go through them, but I will not, because I cried when he did not make that 7 iron into the middle of the green—but, anyway, we will move on.

The team element of the Ryder cup is essential because it brings so many important values to sport, such as the importance of team work and seeking to win for the team. Being at the Walker cup provided me with a real illustration of what needs to be done. There were no Scots in that team, but I am told by the Scottish Golf Union and leading amateurs in the game that that will change next time round, because there is a bunch of very good Scots coming through who will be competitive.

I know that Neil Findlay will say something about golf courses and the membership challenges, so I will not go into that. The only other point that I want to make about visitor income—the minister and Liz Smith mentioned the importance of visitors coming to Scotland to play golf—is that it is not just about Prestwick, Dornoch, East Lothian or the great championship golf courses that we all enjoy playing; it is about so many other golf courses across Scotland that any golfer can go and play.

Frankly, it is nearly impossible to play some of the championship courses, particularly Carnoustie, even for those of us who can play a bit of golf. However, one can go and play an awful lot of really good golf anywhere in Scotland, have a nice meal afterwards at a good clubhouse and just appreciate the experience that is golf in Scotland. I hope that the national tourism drive to bring visitors to Scotland from all over the world is not just about the big courses but the run-of-the-mill golf courses right across our country that provide a great Scottish golfing experience.

15:38

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I echo the comments of Patricia Ferguson, Liz Smith and Tavish Scott concerning our late colleague David McLetchie. I cannot help but think that this debate

is poorer for the absence of David, given the contribution that he would surely have made to it.

Sport retains a very warm place in the affections of our nation and in places beyond these shores. However, one cannot help but reflect on the tarnished nature of some areas of sport, certainly at a professional level, or on the obscenity of a footballer being traded for €100 million, while a teammate is rewarded for signing a new five-year contract with a salary reputed to be worth £15 million a year after tax but before bonuses, when we still have poverty and hunger in the world.

Too often, sport or those who become idols to youngsters as a result of their success in it are found to be unworthy of such adulation. Just yesterday we had a former snooker world championship semi-finalist thrown out of the sport for 12 years for frame-score fixing amid claims by the reigning world champion that cheating of that nature is widespread.

Earlier this year, a leading flat jockey was banned for 10 years for fixing races. The reputations of tennis and athletics have been besmirched recently by doping violations, albeit that in the former case it is accepted to have been accidental and in the case of several leading sprinters B test results are still awaited.

Worst of all, the sport of cycling remains in the shadow of Lance Armstrong. For every bad apple in each of those sports, there are many decent leading participants—people worthy and deserving of the respect of us sports fans—but with every scandal, our faith in those who are, and should be, role models to aspiring youngsters is diminished.

In among all that stands a shining example, in the form of the Ryder cup, of what sport should be about. I want to focus my contribution on the traditions of that event. By virtue of the off-course antics of the former world number 1, golf has attracted its share of adverse publicity. Surely no one would defend the existence of golf clubs that treat women as second-class citizens. However, I cannot—I say this as a former sports journalist—think of an event that better upholds traditional supporting values, while providing almost unrivalled competitiveness, than the Ryder cup does.

And what theatre! Three days of ebbing and flowing drama as participants in a sport, the individual nature of which is normally perhaps matched only by that of boxing, are forged into a team whose spirit, certainly in the case of the Europeans, is something to behold. A year from now, we will have it unfolding right here in Scotland as the Ryder cup returns to the home of golf for the first time since 1967.

The golf fans among us can all name the iconic moments of high drama that have made the Ryder

cup what it is, such as 1985, when the cup was wrenched from USA's grasp for the first time in almost 30 years as Seve Ballesteros and our own Sam Torrance inspired the Europeans to victory, Sam coming from three down at one stage against Andy North to seal the win with an 18-foot birdie putt on the last.

Two years later, Tony Jacklin led Europe to its first ever victory across the pond, thanks in large part to Ballesteros and José María Olazábal. Ben Crenshaw snapped his putter after going two down to Eamonn Darcy with 12 holes to play and had to use his 1 iron to putt for the remainder of the round.

In 1989, Christy O'Connor's 2 iron approach to the final green finished 4 feet from the hole to clinch victory over Fred Couples, allowing Europe to retain the trophy by virtue of a draw, even though the Americans won the last four singles.

Two years later, at Kiawah Island, Colin Montgomerie battled back from four down to take half a point against Mark Calcavecchia, all in vain as Bernhard Langer missed from 6 feet on the last against Hale Irwin.

Yet in the midst of that incredibly competitive environment, traditional sportsmanship survives. The ethos of contesting the relatively modern day Ryder cup in the right way can be traced back to 1969 at Royal Birkdale, when America's Jack Nicklaus conceded a missable putt to Tony Jacklin on the 18th to bring about the very first draw in the competition's history. Of course, that was still enough for the USA to retain the trophy but, by doing what he did, Nicklaus laid down a marker for how the Ryder cup ought to be contested.

As the competition has gone from being contested between the USA and GB to being contested between the USA and GB and Ireland and then, from 1979, USA and Europe, future generations of golfers have heeded that approach.

At the 2006 tournament, who could forget the moment when Darren Clarke, still grieving for his wife Heather, walked on to the first tee at the K Club and his opponent Phil Mickelson held out his hands and embraced him? What about the final hole of the final match when American rookie J J Henry had to hole a 25 footer to halve with Paul McGinley and spare the USA its worst ever beating in the competition, and McGinley conceded the putt?

Four years later, Colin Montgomerie chose not to exercise his prerogative as home captain to set the course up to suit the Europeans because he wanted an honest test that would reward the best team, and we got a competition that went to the very last match before Europe prevailed.

What about in 2012, when Justin Rose sank a monster putt on the 17th and Phil Mickelson—who, remember, was part of a pumped-up US team—gave him the thumbs up?

The Ryder cup has surely changed the way in which we view golf—that is, those of us who play and follow the sport beyond those biennial three days of intense battle. Before Europe started to win the cup, how many of us Scots golf fans were particularly bothered whether an Englishman or any other fellow European was winning majors? Yet now, are we not just as pleased to see a Lee Westwood, a Justin Rose, a Miguel Ángel Jiménez or an Ian Poulter contending as a Martin Laird? Did we not all welcome Henrik Stenson becoming the first European to win the tour championship and FedEx cup at the weekend, because he is, after all, one of us?

That said, we are still first and foremost Scots—a nation with a proud tradition of Ryder cup involvement, supplying winning captains in Monty, Sam Torrance and Bernard Gallacher.

We have not done badly either with participants—Monty, Torrance and Gallacher, not to mention Sandy Lyle, Paul Lawrie, Harry Bannerman, Andrew Coltart and John Panton, among others. Let us not forget Brian Barnes, who contested six Ryder cups and famously defeated Jack Nicklaus twice in one day back in 1975.

Right now, we would not bet on there being a significant home representation in the European ranks at Gleneagles. Looking at the world rankings today, of the top 50 players eligible to turn out for Europe in the Ryder cup, just six are Scots, with only Martin Laird, Stephen Gallacher and Paul Lawrie sitting inside the top 30. However, any of those three and perhaps others such as Marc Warren, Richie Ramsay and Scott Jamieson could strike a rich vein of form and qualify for the team by right and, of course, Paul McGinley has captain's picks, so I am hoping for a Scottish presence in the side. However, regardless of how many—if any—Scots make next year's team, it promises to be some event.

The Americans have won just four of the 14 Ryder cups since 1983 and their triumph of 2008 at Valhalla is a distant memory following the miracle at Medinah last year when Europe, led on the course by the remarkable individual that is Ian Poulter and off it by Olazábal, came from 10-6 down at the beginning of the final day to triumph—a victory that the tearful Olazábal of course dedicated to Seve Ballesteros, who had tragically died a short time earlier.

Under the captaincy of Tom Watson, the Americans will be desperate for revenge. As Europeans, we will hope that Paul McGinley's side resists that but, more than anything, surely all of

us wish for a competition that once again upholds the very best in Ryder cup tradition and shows Gleneagles and Scotland in the most favourable of lights.

15:45

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I say first that David McLetchie, who chaired the cross-party group on golf, which I attended, was a great companion on the golf course and a very good companion at the 19th hole.

This is probably not the right time or place to admit to an affair, but I do so now. It is a long-term yet unrequited love affair. No matter how much I shared my emotions, shed many tears and had the occasional smile—no matter how often I cared for and adored the instruments of that love, I confess that that love is still unfulfilled. My love affair of course is with the sport of kings and people—golf.

It is a love affair that spawned a son, of whom I am very proud, who is a senior teaching professional at one of the UK's top country clubs, in Surrey. It is a love affair that has seen all my grandsons but in particular my four-year-old grandson Fraser outdriving their granddad. I am told by my son and my grandsons that I have an old man's slow swing so, although I may love more slowly, I still do so as ardently and as compellingly as ever.

I also admit to having an obsession that is shared with many of seeking the holy grail and its possible physical manifestation at Rosslyn. That is mirrored by an obsession with seeking its sporting equivalent, be it at Muirfield, near Rosslyn; Troon in South Ayrshire, where we hold the 2016 open championship; Prestwick Old, where the first open championship was held; St Andrews with its Old, New and Eden courses, the new courses at Kingsbarns and the Duke's course; and of course at Turnberry.

Turnberry is famous, as has been mentioned, for the 1977 open duel in the sun between two of the world's greatest golfers—Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson, to whom Tavish Scott referred. Turnberry is also famous because at the ninth hole on the Ailsa course stand the remnants of the castle where, allegedly, Robert the Bruce was born. Indeed it is a theatre that is suitable for heroes and kings of golf and of history.

In seeking the requital of that love affair, I have walked, I have hooked, I have sliced, I have duck hooked and yipped my way around courses such as Cruden Bay, Elie, Rosemount, Carnoustie, Ladybank and many of the other great Scottish courses.

Next year, although having played Kings, Queens and the former Monarch course, I will be allowed, I hope, to enter the new coliseum of golf, one of the great citadels—the Gleneagles Centenary golf course. It is an amphitheatre that more than matches those that have been mentioned, such as the Belfry, Kiawah Island and the beautiful course of Medinah, which held the Ryder cup last year.

The prospect of the competition between the great golfing regions of the USA and Europe, led respectively by the aforesaid Tom Watson and Paul McGinley is mouthwatering to a golfer. This will not be so much a rumble in the jungle as a fight on the fairway. For the first time in 40 years, since 1973, and for only the second time in the history of Samuel Ryder's cup, Scotland will play host to the greatest gladiatorial golfing match play in history.

Welcome to the home of true golf—match play, not stroke play.

Yesterday, I played the Centenary course, which is a classic course, but regrettably, I could play it only on the internet. The greatest of all golfers, Jack Nicklaus, who designed it, described it as

"The finest parcel of land in the world I have ever been given to work with."

I played it last night and I scored a respectable 70. Well, that was on hole 1, Bracken Brae, and then I moved on to the second hole. The web-based system tells the player that

"The green, slightly raised above the fairway, is bunkered at the front and back and lies at an angle."

I do not know how McIlroy or Woods will approach that course, but I would certainly need a satnav to play it in reality.

So my love is coming home. The course has been adorned externally by an updated railway system, with timetables that we discussed with ScotRail at a dinner the other evening. Those who were involved should be congratulated on that adornment. The £5.27 million investment in the Ryder cup and the Commonwealth games has been money well spent. There are new and safe slip roads on to the A90, thereby exhibiting all that is good in our scenery and so much more. I make one appeal, however, which is that we keep all our new and old roads, new and old streets, free from litter so that we can present our country in its best light.

We will have an exhibition that demonstrates our welcome to all our international visitors and shows them Scotland's quality food and drink, customer service, infrastructure, sensible hospitality and, hopefully, pricing, and efficiency. We should remember that we want our

international visitors to come back, to come back, and to come back.

Above all, the real legacy will follow the Ryder cup. We have heard much mentioned about the concept of clubgolf. I have always subscribed to the idea and I am proud that the Government has pledged to put a golf club in every child's hand by the age of nine, in the same way as I would like to see violins and pianos made available across the nation as they are in Raploch. Who knows? That might create a future Scottish golf champion. That should be our ambition and aspiration because, in its own tiny way, golf will play its role in a more expansive and happier Scots society.

Like any aspiring Lothario, I will enter the great golfing boudoir of Gleneagles to see great love being consummated next year. I applaud all who have been involved from government—the First Minister, the minister for sport, Perth and Kinross Council and many others who had the foresight to determine the huge return that there will be from a well-spent investment.

15:53

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in support of the Government's motion on preparations for what is one of the largest and most prestigious golfing events in the world, which, together with the Commonwealth games and the second year of the homecoming, will put Scotland well and truly on the international stage in 2014 as we welcome the world to Scotland. From the warmth of our welcome to the quality of the facilities we have to offer, we could not have better opportunities than the Ryder cup and the Commonwealth games to demonstrate that, as the minister said in her opening remarks, Scotland is the perfect stage for major events.

Many of those members who are geographically closer than I am to the Ryder cup location have already commented on specific aspects of the preparations for the event, so I will focus my remarks on some of the legacy benefits that we can secure as a result of the Ryder cup, such as wider participation, tourism opportunities, and physical activity and its implications for health and wellbeing.

There is no question but that Scotland has a huge amount to offer as far as golf is concerned—from the local public courses to the most prestigious venues, there is something for everyone. The Ryder cup gives us a platform to encourage more people and, in particular, our youngsters to take up the game. I very much welcome the range of initiatives that the Scottish Government has introduced to spark energy among our young people for the game.

There are opportunities to volunteer at the event, and in that respect I welcome the minister's announcement about the new Ryder cup volunteer support scheme, which will give up to 50 young people from across Scotland the opportunity to volunteer and provide financial support for that. On Monday, 16 lucky youngsters from across Scotland, including my constituent 14-year-old Maria Cowan, a pupil at the Douglas Ewart high school in Newton Stewart, had the fantastic chance to take on the 2014 Ryder cup captains and golfing legends Tom Watson and Paul McGinley.

Maria Cowan's golfing skills were developed through Scotland's national junior programme, clubgolf, before she graduated to the Scottish golf development centre programme that is being supported by the Portpatrick Dunskey golf club and which enables some of south-west Scotland's younger talent to receive coaching from top PGA professionals. I very much hope that Maria Cowan will go on to become one of the next generation's golfing champions—who knows?

Dumfries and Galloway is already planning how to maximise the economic and tourism benefits from the Ryder cup. It is a part of Scotland that is rich in golf courses. People can play at Southernness, a championship links course on the Solway coast, which, according to *Golf Monthly*—a magazine that I read avidly—is one of the top 100 courses in Britain and Ireland. Dumfries has four courses, or people can play in the surroundings of Bruce's castle at Lochmaben or among the stunning scenery of Luce Bay at Wigtownshire County's stunning links course. That is not to mention the three golf trails that can be followed—the tiger trail, the challenge trail and the little gems trail.

I hope that many of the visitors who head to Gleneagles will bear in mind what Dumfries and Galloway has to offer in the way of hidden golfing gems. Given that many people will be travelling north through the region or through the Loch Ryan ports from Ireland and Northern Ireland, Dumfries and Galloway is ideally placed to add value to golf fans' experience of Scotland. VisitScotland has certainly recognised that fact and has rolled out the gateway to golf scheme, which last year sold 4,000 rounds of golf, bringing in £85,000 to the participating clubs. So far, 18 of the region's golf clubs are involved with the marketing project as well as 11 significant accommodation providers.

On the wider legacy for the region, Dumfries and Galloway Council is looking at targeted delivery of the clubgolf programme to primary 5 classes using primary physical education specialists. Last year, 100 of Dumfries and Galloway's primary schools participated, with a target of 100 per cent coverage of the region for

2014. Dumfries and Galloway's active schools and community sport teams are looking to develop links with golf clubs to expand on clubgolf, and local and regional primary golf competitions are now included in the region's physical education, physical activity and sport calendar.

Next year's Ryder cup at Gleneagles provides Scotland with huge opportunities to raise the general profile of golf as a sport and to embed the image of Scotland in the eyes of the world as the home of golf and a place that is resplendent with some of the best and most varied courses that can be found. In so doing, it will leave a genuine lasting legacy for the whole of Scotland in terms of education, volunteering, tourism, infrastructure and sport. I am therefore delighted that the Ryder cup will be back in Scotland next September.

15:59

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I declare an interest as a member of Greenburn golf club and a member of the cross-party group on golf. I really do love my sport, but I am afraid that this is one of those times when people looking in from outside the Parliament must wonder what relevance this place has to their lives.

I do not know about you, Presiding Officer, but my postbag is not bulging with letters asking for my views on the subject of a year to go until the Ryder cup—

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: Certainly—I am sure that Annabelle Ewing's postbag is.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank Mr Findlay for giving way, but it is a wee bit disappointing that he has started his speech in that tone. Perhaps, in the next five minutes or so, the tone will change and he will become a bit more positive and optimistic.

As an MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, I am contacted—as I am sure Elizabeth Smith is—by many people who want to discuss the 2014 Ryder cup.

Neil Findlay: Annabelle Ewing will know that I am always positive, so she has nothing to fear there.

As I was saying, I do not know how many members—other than those from very local constituencies—have had emails and letters about the Ryder cup; I do not think that many of us have. I am wondering what debate the Government will bring to the chamber next to allow its members to go to the Dunfermline by-election with: perhaps “Christmas—three months to go” or “Pancake Tuesday—six months of excitement left”.

Shona Robison: Neil Findlay's comments are very unfortunate. This is the one and only

opportunity that the Parliament has had to discuss the Ryder cup. We have discussed the Commonwealth games on a number of occasions, and I hope that Mr Findlay will not say the same when we debate the games again later in the year. He needs to raise his game somewhat.

Neil Findlay: Do not worry—I will go on to the substance of the debate. There are many great things going on at the elite end of the game in Scotland, and we have a crop of very high-quality players who are among the top 500 in the world. They include people such as Martin Laird, Paul Lawrie and Stephen Gallacher—and, of course, Catriona Matthews, who was a member of the team that was recently victorious in the Solheim cup, and Carly Booth, who is coming through very rapidly. Over the past few decades, Colin Montgomerie and Sam Torrance have been standard bearers for Scotland, flying the flag worldwide for the home of golf.

The hosting of the Ryder cup next year is, of course, eagerly anticipated. The match is, alongside the open and the masters, the top event in the golfing calendar. Over the years, as members have mentioned, there has been thrill after thrill. Any golfer—or any golfing or sports enthusiast who was watching—will never forget Bernhard Langer's anguish at Kiawah Island, Torrance's putt at the Belfry, or McDowell's victory at Celtic Manor. The most recent Ryder cup at Medinah was just something else. I watched the match on an iPad in the middle of a ceilidh at the Labour Party conference—the things that one will do to avoid dancing with Margaret Curran, but there we go.

Over the years, Scots such as Bernard Gallacher and John Jacobs have played prominent roles not only as players but as captains too. Graeme Dey referred to the greatest Scottish story, in which the legendary Brian Barnes beat Jack Nicklaus at the peak of his powers twice in one day. I recall seeing Brian Barnes play at Dalmahoy when I was in primary 7. He was perhaps not the most shining example to young golfers, as I remember him marking his ball on the green with a beer can, which went down in golfing legend; I hope that people would not do that these days.

All that at the elite end of the game is fantastic, but at club level things are quite different, and many clubs are struggling in the current economic climate. Ten years ago many local clubs had waiting lists of five or 10 years, or even longer. Membership was a reasonable price, and demand was very high. In my area of West Lothian, clubs catered largely for the communities in which they were located, and local people made up a significant part of the membership. Now, due to falling incomes and wages being frozen, waiting

lists have largely been wiped out as people give up membership or take their name off the waiting list because they simply do not have the money to join.

According to the Scottish Golf Union, adult male membership rates have fallen by 15 per cent since 2004, and there are 25 per cent fewer women playing. That has resulted in clubs' income falling considerably while costs are increasing, and many are facing significant financial problems. In such circumstances, the temptation for clubs is to cut fees and day ticket prices to compete for a diminishing group of potential members and visitors. Such a race to the bottom on price could be a grave mistake, with clubs competing themselves out of existence.

Instead, we need to support clubs in planning ahead to maximise their income and cut their costs while maintaining the quality of their unique selling point: golf played in the country where the game was invented on natural courses and in beautiful surroundings. To that end, I want the Government, sportscotland, councils and the business community to work very closely with the Scottish Golf Union and clubs to expand the clubs' business planning skills and knowledge, and I want the SGU management development programme to be rolled out to as many clubs as possible to support their long-term planning and sustainability and a not insignificant number of direct and supply-chain jobs. Given some organisation and time, there will be obvious opportunities to develop revenue and make savings—renewables development is an obvious example—and if clubs could work together and establish joint initiatives to save money on energy supply, insurance, the purchasing of maintenance materials, food and equipment they could achieve significant economies of scale.

The Ryder cup will be a huge global event in 2014 that will excite and thrill people; it will certainly excite and be relished by Scotland's large army of fans. However, I hope that one of the greatest events in the game will not be followed by the disappearance of some long-established community clubs, because that would be a legacy that we could really live without.

Finally, a number of colleagues have mentioned David McLetchie. I twice partnered him in the annual match between the Parliament and the press pack and our partnership was socially successful if not always a sporting success. I am sure that it will surprise no one to hear that I tended to hit to the left and David much further to the right but in his excitement about the Ryder cup coming to Scotland he was like a wee boy. It is just very sad that he will not be here to see it.

16:07

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

In line with most of this afternoon's speeches, mine will begin with my declaring an interest in that I have played golf—and I will probably leave it at that. Suffice it to say that from here on in I will be sticking to crazy putting with my children.

Nevertheless, I am a great fan of golf and the Ryder cup. Even many of those who do not enjoy watching golf find the excitement that it generates to be infectious. I note the comments that have been made about the victory at Medinah in 2012; for those who recall the match at Brookline in 1999, I note that it was good to see Europe doing the reverse at Medinah and coming back from a seemingly irreversible deficit on the final day against all the odds. What was particularly sweet was that the victory was secured by one of Europe's more out-of-form players, Martin Kaymer; indeed, one of the beauties of the Ryder cup is that it often makes heroes out of players whose form up to that point might well have been patchy and who might not have been performing well in regular tournament play.

The Ryder cup is going to bring a lot of golf fans to Scotland in 2014. Obviously a lot of people in Scotland will attend the tournament but a lot of people from Europe and the US will be coming to watch and cheer on their respective teams. In that respect, there are obvious links not just to the wider tourism agenda that members have referred to but to the golf tourism agenda in particular; after all, many of these people will be keen golfers as well as golf fans and will be visiting not just for the duration of the Ryder cup but for one, two or even three weeks, depending on their schedules. As a result, we must promote the very best golf courses that are available. I appreciate that some might not want to play just the elite courses and, indeed, the elite courses are not always the best ones to play on. There are also very good municipal courses that are worth highlighting.

I want to focus on one course in particular—and I am sure that it will surprise members no end to hear that I am going to talk about Royal Aberdeen golf club, which is in my constituency. Between July 10 and 13 next year, Royal Aberdeen is going to host the 2014 Scottish open. In order to link this to the Ryder cup, I note that the course is also the one where, in 2005, the British senior open was held. That was won by the current US Ryder cup captain, Tom Watson, in a sudden-death playoff against Des Smyth, himself a previous European Ryder cup vice-captain. The course, due to its hosting of the Scottish open in the year of the Ryder cup and the fact that it has a link—albeit tenuous—to the current Ryder cup line-up, sees itself as being in a position to capitalise on the presence of the Ryder cup in Scotland and the

ensuing golf tourism. Having spoken to Ronnie MacAskill, the director of golf at Royal Aberdeen golf club, I know that he is keen to see the club benefit in that way. In 2005, some 23,349 people came to Royal Aberdeen for the senior open. The club hopes that more than that will come in 2014 for the Scottish open, which is estimated to generate somewhere in the region of £10 million for the local economy.

I have mentioned previously the controversy that existed around the hosting of the event by Royal Aberdeen. That controversy arose not through anything that the Scottish Government said, but through the actions of some local councillors in Aberdeen, who have taken the opportunity to play politics with the event. I would hope that the issue will finally be dropped and that we can get on with looking forward to what will be a fantastic event for the city of Aberdeen, rather than seeing some people seeking to undermine the event for narrow political agendas.

I was interested in the mentions of the clubgolf programme and undertook to look up the statistics for Aberdeen—I was unable to get statistics right down to constituency level, but I got hold of the participation rates for Aberdeen. I hear what Patricia Ferguson was saying about wanting to encourage greater participation, and I absolutely concur with her words. However it is interesting to note that the Aberdeen figures show that the level of participation for girls is virtually the same as it is for boys—the last figures that were made available showed 650 girls participating and 662 boys participating.

As has been mentioned, the female game is on the rise in terms of skill levels—we see female golfers occasionally joining male tournaments in the United States, and I think that we will start to see more of that as the elite female golfers become ever closer to the elite male golfers in terms of ability. I am not saying that they are not capable golfers but, obviously, the physiology often leads to them not being able to drive the same distances, although that is becoming less and less of an issue. I hear Mr Findlay sighing, but I recently watched the Solheim cup on Sky television, and I have to say that I found it to be almost as exciting as any Ryder cup match that I have ever watched, or any other tournament. I think that the Solheim cup is very much on the rise as well, and perhaps Scotland should bid to hold it at some stage in the future.

Aberdeen has its own link to the Ryder cup through Paul Lawrie, who played in 1999 and was joint top point scorer and then played in 2012. It was something of a rich moment for Paul Lawrie—who was, obviously, on the receiving end of the Brookline result—to be able to be involved in the Medinah result; indeed, he played a key role in it,

through his defeat of Brandt Snedeker in the singles play on the final day. Paul Lawrie has launched the Paul Lawrie Foundation, which encourages young people to get involved in the game and seeks to develop their enthusiasm for the sport. It and the Scottish Government's clubgolf initiative are the kind of things that we should be seeking to advance and to support where possible.

I note Mr Findlay's comments about the future of many golf clubs hanging in the balance, with depressed incomes leading to people taking themselves off waiting lists. I think that the Ryder cup might have the opposite effect, in that through the increased interest in golf that it could generate, more people might seek to take up the sport, in the same way as people often seek to take up tennis in the immediate aftermath of Wimbledon. Often, the ripple is very shallow, but we might see more people becoming interested in getting involved in local golf.

I wonder whether something could be done to support some of those municipal clubs that might see an upsurge in applications for membership with which they might find that they are unable to cope in the initial stages. Perhaps something could be done through the Scottish Government's legacy work to help to support the clubs and enable them to take on more members, because we want to ensure that people who find themselves enthused and inspired to get involved in golf—or perhaps to get back into golf—do not find that they are unable to do so, because we want to encourage more people to take up the sport as a result of the Ryder cup.

I look forward to hearing the minister's remarks in her closing speech.

16:15

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): I promise that there will be no golf jokes in my speech. I also confess that I am not a great golf fan. However, I am a fan of what the Ryder cup can do for Scotland and, unlike Neil Findlay, I welcome the debate.

The Ryder cup is the most prestigious team golf tournament and it attracts vast commercial interest from a large selection of multinational brands. It will also bring thousands of spectators for every day of the tournament.

The Ryder cup is a biennial men's golf competition between teams from Europe and the United States. The venue for the competition, which is jointly administrated by the PGA of America and the PGA European tours, alternates between courses in the USA and Europe.

The Ryder cup is named after the English businessman, Samuel Ryder, who donated the trophy. Originally contested between Great Britain and the United States, the first official Ryder cup took place in 1927 at Worcester Country Club in Massachusetts USA. The home team won the first five contests, but, with the competition's resumption after the second world war, repeated American dominance led to a decision to extend the representation from Great Britain and Ireland to continental Europe from 1979. The inclusion of continental European golfers was partly prompted by the success of the new generation of Spanish golfers, led by Seve Ballesteros and Antonio Garrido.

In 1973 the official title of the British team was changed from Great Britain to Great Britain and Ireland but that was simply a change of name to reflect the fact that golfers from the Republic of Ireland had been playing on the Great Britain Ryder cup team since 1953, while Northern Irish players had competed since 1947. Since 1979 Europe has won nine times outright and retained the cup once in a tied match; there have been seven American wins over the period.

The European team has included players from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden. The Ryder cup, and its counterpart the presidents cup, remain exceptions in the world of professional sport because the players receive no prize money, despite the events' high profile and the fact that they bring in large amounts of money in television and sponsorship revenue.

It is clear from the tournament ambassadors who were present on Monday to mark one year to go to the start of the tournament, who included celebrities such as Alan Hansen, Marvin Humes and Jodie Kidd, that golf and the Ryder cup captivate members of the public from all walks of life and age groups.

I am pleased to say that the Scottish Government established clubgolf in 2003, investing £500,000 in a project to introduce every nine-year old to golf, and that 260,000 children have participated in the sport through this scheme.

The Ryder cup is one of the premier sporting events in the world and will be broadcast in 183 countries and reach half a billion homes. Last year the Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport said that the Ryder cup would generate 45,000 visitors a day. I welcome her comments and hope that those figures can be reached and exceeded.

With Scotland's increased visibility on the world stage it is estimated that the Scottish economy will benefit by over £100 million during the week that the Ryder cup is played. Those financial benefits will mostly be felt in the tourism industry by accommodation providers, the hospitality sector,

food and drink suppliers, and travel and transport providers.

I hope that, although the international visitors are here primarily for the fantastic golf on display in Gleneagles, they will find time during their trip to visit some of Scotland's other excellent tourist attractions and thus extend the financial boost to other parts of Scotland.

The advantages to Gleneagles, the surrounding areas and Scotland as a whole from hosting the Ryder cup are not limited to the financial gains. There should be an increase in participation and in support for golf clubs as—to repeat what Mark McDonald said earlier—more youngsters are encouraged to take up golf. Local infrastructure, such as public transport and amenities, will provide a lasting legacy to be enjoyed by members of the public for years after the event has finished. In addition, the official charities that are selected for the event will benefit hugely from their association with the Ryder cup and, in turn, will be able to do more for their chosen areas of expertise.

Like many members, I do not play golf, but as a local authority councillor I had a golf club within my ward. Bellshill Golf Club is an excellent organisation, with greens and fairways that are maintained to a high standard. Located beside Strathclyde park—another excellent local facility in Central region—the club has allowed my constituents to play the game of golf for 108 years. I hope that, due to the intense interest generated, the Ryder cup will encourage people like me, who have not previously experienced the sport, to take it up in the years to come. I hope that that will help local courses and encourage community spirit, given that courses serve as an excellent local hub where people can get together and socialise. Golf clubs, like bowling clubs, are an excellent setting in which people can socialise—they do so after the 18th hole, so the clubhouse is often said to be the 19th hole.

With one year to go, I wish good luck to all those who are selected for both the American and European teams. I hope that the 2014 Ryder cup produces all the excitement and drama that golf clubs and golf fans have come to expect from this most famous of tournaments. The point of having the Ryder cup come to Scotland is that it is an excellent facility and will ensure that Scotland will be on the front of most sporting pages for the week that it takes place. I welcome today's debate and compliment the minister on the work that she has done on the issue in the past.

16:22

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I was slightly surprised that Neil

Findlay did not claim Samuel Ryder as a working-class hero. Samuel Ryder was born in relatively humble circumstances—his father was a gardener and his mother was a dressmaker—and he built his business from his little shed at the end of the garden behind his terraced house. He was the first person to send out penny packets of seeds, which he posted on a Friday to ensure that his working-class clients, having received them on Saturday morning, could use their time off on Saturday afternoon to work in their allotments. He built his fortune, which led to his endowing the Ryder cup, from an entirely working-class background. I hope that, when Mr Findlay reads the *Official Report* of today's debate, he will take note of that background.

Of course, perhaps one reason why Mr Findlay did not speak about Samuel Ryder is that Samuel Ryder was also a politician. I was surprised that Tavish Scott did not make reference to the fact that Samuel Ryder got elected to St Alban's town council in 1903, became the lord mayor in 1905 and continued to serve on the council until 1916. As a Liberal, he was extremely critical of his predecessors in office, who were also Liberals, so perhaps that explains why Tavish Scott said little about him.

In our country, golf is par excellence a sport that is broadly open to all. In the 1980s, my wife had staff in Tokyo, who told her that to join a golf club cost in excess of not 1 million yen but £1 million. Furthermore, the golf clubs in Tokyo were only driving ranges. They were not golf clubs with 18 holes of grass around which it would be possible to play the game that we associate with golf.

In many other countries, golf is a sport of the elite but, in Scotland, every town and village has some engagement with it. It is a very different kind of sport for us. That is why it is important not only internationally, but for all the people of Scotland that we are host to the Ryder cup. It is a sport for the masses in a way that it may not so readily be elsewhere.

Tavish Scott also mentioned Colin Montgomerie. He was the victorious Ryder cup captain in 2010 and played in the cup on five occasions. He says on the VisitScotland website:

"Scotland, for me, is home."

Like other members, my golfing experience is more limited than I would wish. However, I will make a unique claim as the only member speaking in the debate whose average score on championship courses is par.

I should explain that, in the mid 1990s, I flew my pals Laurence and Tom across to play the Machrie course on Islay. I walked round with them and we came into the 10th hole—the Machrie burn hole. It is a formidable hole with a water hazard to the left, another to the right and some standing stones that

the ball could bounce off. However, it was par 3 and it was only 110m. I was handed a club, fluked the ball on to the edge of the green, fluked it within 6in of the hole, and parred that championship hole. I handed the golf club back because I did not want to compromise my average score of par on a championship course. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and I hope that, when time permits in future, I will return to golf.

Golf is an important business as well as an important recreation. The north-east of Scotland probably underperforms to some extent on tourism. However, one of the big draws that we have is our local golf courses and I hope that the Ryder cup will introduce them to a wider audience.

I will start with the Duff House royal golf course. It was redesigned in 1923 by Dr Alister Mackenzie who went on to design the world-famous Augusta national course. It is an excellent course—a classic links course—and the club has a wide social membership because the 19th hole is as famous as the other 18.

There is also Fraserburgh golf course. A well-known politician—the First Minister—plays on it from time to time. Let me give a little advice to members who have not played with the First Minister. He does not play a great deal and has no handicap but members should not be deceived. He will exploit that lack of handicap at the outset. Members should not let him con them. He is much better than many golfers who do not have a handicap.

The club itself describes the course in challenging terms as having

“undulating fairways ... wonderful views ... spectacular holes”

and being

“a true links adventure from start to finish.”

Peterhead has a golf course as well. Buckie has Strathlene Buckie golf course. It is not an immensely long golf course—it is some 6,000 yards—but it is a cliff-top course that may see golfers being as friendly as they can be on a golf course and to golf balls by not striking the ball very often because it goes off and makes its own way in life.

Cullen golf course is described as one of the top 100 in the world. It was designed by Tom Morris. Our connections in the north-east with golf greats are quite substantial.

Perhaps one of the reasons why I did not get terribly engaged with golf is that, although my father—like me—was essentially right-handed, for some reason unknown to me, he played golf left-handed. Therefore, his golf clubs were left-handed golf clubs, which made it rather difficult for me. If I

have not been as engaged with golf as I might be, I entirely blame him.

One of my interests is aviation. I exercised that interest when I flew my pals to Islay. At Edinburgh airport, light aircraft used to fly in to their own runway. That is no longer available—the airport has got too busy and the space is needed for other things. We used to fly over Turnhouse golf course. On our approach to the runway, we would occasionally get hit by golf balls. I am not quite sure whether that alarmed the pilots more than the golfers, but at least when someone skied a drive, we were there to knock it back on to the fairway. A number of our aircraft ended up with dents.

I will leave members with one little fact. There are very few sizes of golf clubs, and there is a good reason for that. If you stand beside someone whose height is 1 foot different from yours, you will find that your knuckles are the same height off the ground as theirs are—within 3 inches. Golf is accessible to all because everyone can use the same set of golf clubs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

We come to the closing speeches. Members who have participated in the debate should be in the chamber for closing speeches unless they have given a reason not to be here.

16:31

Liz Smith: I thank members for their kind words about our colleague David McLetchie, which he would have been touched by. I also think that he would have been faintly amused by some of the comments, not least by members' frank admissions—and, in some cases, boasts—about their golfing prowess.

Members were absolutely right about David's passion for golf. He also had a passion for cricket, which members will know is the game that is my primary passion. I once took David to a cricket dinner at which the famous Gary Sobers was the main speaker. The latter—rather unbelievably, I have to say—spent at least 20 minutes describing the six balls that he hit for six runs in the same over. On that occasion, he took some questions from members of the audience, one of whom was a certain David McLetchie. I was struck then by the extraordinarily encyclopaedic knowledge that David had of sport. I thought that Tavish Scott was going to share his encyclopaedic knowledge of all the golf holes round which he followed Tom Watson in 2009.

At that dinner, David McLetchie showed a great knowledge not only of sport but of the spirit that Graeme Dey talked about in what I thought was an extremely well-prepared speech about the values that emanate from the game. I compliment him on that speech, because I think that he said

something very special about the intrinsic value of the Ryder cup.

It has been an extremely wide-ranging debate, which is a good thing. By that, I mean that, as well as providing facts, it has had entertainment value. That is good, because it tells us what it is about Scotland hosting the Ryder cup that captures the imagination—although I have to say, from reading the newspapers, that the issue that is most likely to capture the public's imagination is who is picked for the European team. Speculation is intense about who those people will be.

We have heard a lot about the potential for economic and tourism development. We all hope that the hosting of the tournament will bring about a significant increase in the number of golf tourists who visit Scotland, not just in 2014 but in the years to come. The figure of 250,000, which is the number of visitors who are expected to attend the week-long event, has caused quite a sharp intake of breath in many parts of Strathearn, Perthshire and Kinross-shire, and I know for a fact that the hotels, bed and breakfasts and holiday rentals there are already very close to capacity for that week. Some extremely imaginative projects are being discussed with the business community in and around the area, and the schools and community groups have joined in that discussion. That is all good news.

As has been mentioned, over the years many Governments have announced strategies with great expectations of increasing visitor numbers, only to be a little disappointed by the growth years later. However, I commend the Scottish Government and the minister for all the work that is being done, because this is no easy challenge. We all have a part to play in ensuring that the Ryder cup is one of the best things that Scotland has ever hosted.

Members have mentioned what a magnificent venue Gleneagles will be. It already has a first-class reputation for hosting major golfing events and many world conferences, and I am sure that the Ryder cup will be another feather in its cap as such a venue.

The Ryder cup management team says that it is taking additional steps to ensure that the transport that is laid on from the park and rides takes routes that show visitors some of the best scenery in Scotland. There could hardly be a better invitation to come to Gleneagles.

Annabelle Ewing said that the new website that Perth and Kinross Council has launched to provide in-depth information to residents, visitors and local businesses is an important part of the information process. I am glad that the council is looking to refine that website as it gets feedback from the community. The way in which the Ryder cup

management team has interacted with that is a strongly optimistic point.

Such information will be crucial in the coming months because, whether we like it or not, some residents and businesses in the surrounding area will still feel a little anxious about what the Ryder cup will mean for them on a daily basis. Every effort is being made to reassure them.

The legacy that is hardest to define is the sporting legacy. I mentioned that it is difficult to ensure that that legacy stays for a longer period. We should not just bring in youngsters to experience golf for a few days; we must have something that has lasting permanence.

It might be interesting for the minister to look at initiatives that colleges, universities and private schools in Scotland have taken; they have done a lot to offer new golf scholarships in their communities. We talk about philanthropists and the private sector, and it would be nice for such scholarships to be offered to state schools, because it is inevitable that there will be far more children in state schools who would want to take advantage of them. If we thought about building golf scholarships, we might have more success in providing a legacy that lasts for years to come.

There is no getting away from the fact that it is difficult for some golf clubs just now to afford to have a high membership of young people, who are not in a position to pay high fees. It would therefore be good if we looked at other areas for the extra-curricular commitment.

Positive work is being undertaken by the Scottish Government and—I hope—by all of us through the part that we have to play. It is great for golf fans, Scotland and Perthshire that Scotland is hosting the Ryder cup and it is great for the Parliament to be part of that exciting challenge, which I hope will bring us everything that we want and which the nation deserves.

16:38

Patricia Ferguson: The debate has been interesting and wide ranging—not just geographically, but historically. There have also been personal revelations, although we could have done without one or two of them. It is interesting to note the amount of therapy that we have provided by giving many members the opportunity to declare their lack of involvement in golf—so far. Perhaps we can do something about that.

I was interested to hear about the logistical issues from Liz Smith and Annabelle Ewing, who have local connections with Gleneagles. I was going to call them logistical problems, but many of the potential problems have been ironed out. I am

sure that that was not done easily and that it took a great deal of planning over many years. I very much hope that all that hard work will pay off in the end.

Liz Smith was absolutely right to say that, although all of us would accept that the event will be excellent for Scotland, it may not be such an attractive proposition for those who will have it absolutely on their doorstep; it may disrupt their lives in ways that they will not appreciate. It is important that the views of such people are reflected in the plans that are being made.

Colleagues have been keen to mention that we should capitalise on the increased visitor numbers; of course we must do that. I hope that people who come here for the Ryder cup do not just come and watch the tournament, but will range throughout Scotland. Even if they are here only to play golf—which is an important thing to do—and to watch it, I hope that they will do that around the country on the many excellent courses here, some of which we have heard about.

I was going to say that Dennis Robertson made the best pun of the day, but he just had the first pun of the day. It occurred to me that perhaps VisitScotland has somewhat missed a trick in not having capitalised on his absolute enthusiasm for his region, and in not having somehow condensed it into a little advert that could be used to portray how excited people like him are about what the Ryder cup can bring to their area.

I was struck—I say this with my tongue slightly in my cheek—when Dennis Robertson regaled us with all the things that are happening in 2014. I mentioned that 2014 would be an exciting year; I am pleased that the Labour-led Executive had the foresight to provide most of the events in that year. The current Government has added an extra one in there as well, of course. Dennis Robertson's contribution and those of other members in response to it say to us that we must remember that there are for some people additional barriers to playing or participating in any sport. Cost is often a barrier and we must always bear it in mind that costs are much higher for disabled people. A bike for a 10-year-old who wants to take part in sport or who just wants to play on a bike will be a couple of hundred pounds maximum, but if a disabled child wants a specially adapted bike, it will be £1,000 minimum for them to be able to have the same experience as their non-disabled colleagues.

I was struck by Graeme Pearson's contribution. He must be one of the few former police officers whom I have met who does not play golf. I suppose that even non-believers might be inspired next year. We just have to cross that extra hurdle to get Graeme Pearson over the line. He made a valid point about the experience of organising

major events such as the Ryder cup and being involved in them. The effect of that, and of the experience at such events, on the emergency services' awareness of logistical problems in their area can be taken forward to less helpful situations. Graeme Pearson was right to raise that point.

I was also struck that Graeme Pearson, Annabelle Ewing and Richard Lyle admitted to not being golfers. I wonder whether we need to have an induction event for members in the run-up to the Ryder cup. That may be a bit too much of an ask for the minister, so perhaps the cross-party group on golf can do something about it.

Tavish Scott was right to identify the tickets issue. I have been delighted with the way in which the Commonwealth games tickets have been dealt with. I tried to get tickets for the Olympic games and eventually managed, but I had a number of complaints about that process, which I fed in to the organisers of the Commonwealth games, because I thought that those complaints needed to be fed in. The experience of bidding for tickets for the games in Glasgow was much easier than it was for the London Olympics. There was a lesson well learned. In fact, it was so well learned that I might be a bit unhappy when I see my bank balance, if I am successful and get all the tickets that I have asked for. There is a contrast, however, and we cannot really liken that event to the Ryder cup. They are very different events, but it would be interesting to see how many Scots manage to get tickets through the bidding process, and whether the number is as large as we would like it to be.

Tavish Scott's enthusiasm for Tom Watson has slightly depressed me about our prospects next year. I will spend the remainder of the year trying very hard not to take that seriously, because I think that we can overcome even Tom Watson's greatness.

I was struck by a comment that Tavish Scott made about golf courses around the country. I remember very clearly conversations a number of years ago, when we had direct flights from Stockholm to Prestwick. Unfortunately, those flights no longer exist. I think that I am right in saying that North Ayrshire Council was worried about the effect that they would have on use of its municipal greens at weekends, because Swedish golfers came to Ayrshire to play at points in the year when it was too cold to play at home, but could still play in Scotland. The council was thinking at that point about whether it might need to provide more municipal courses for those incoming golfers to play on. Sadly, that is no longer the case, but it is important that when we have such connections we maximise the benefit.

Liz Smith complimented Graeme Dey on his speech and I will do likewise. It was interesting

and well laid out. As a keen observer of sport over many years, he had a lot to tell us, and we can learn a lot from his comments. He was absolutely right to identify the importance of golfers as role models. Sometimes young people are too inclined to see footballers as their role models.

I have been very struck by the bad press that Andy Murray gets for his demeanour, which I think is unjustified. Anyone who watched the documentary about Andy Murray that was shown before and after Wimbledon will know about his sheer drive and determination and about the sacrifices that sportspeople like him make so that they can reach the peak of perfection in their game. That is the kind of example that we want young people to learn from, and I think that many golfers are similar role models.

I was getting a bit worried during Chic Brodie's speech. I was wondering how far he would take his analogy, if I may be brutally honest. However, none of us can be in any doubt about his passion for golf, which is to be welcomed.

Aileen McLeod talked about activity in her region. A few years ago I witnessed at first hand some of the active schools work that was going on in Dumfries and Galloway, so it is wonderful to hear that the programme is still growing. I do not know whether Aileen McLeod was hinting that a subscription to *Golf Monthly* would be a good Christmas present; maybe not, but at least she has put a marker down.

Neil Findlay was right to mention the SGU's strategy. If clubs are having a problem, it is important that we work out how to get the young people who are involved in clubgolf into clubs in an affordable and sustainable way.

Mark McDonald will excuse me when I say that I rarely agree with him. Today, however, I agreed with almost every word that he said—I stress “almost”, which gives us both a bit of a way out. He was right to say that the Ryder cup generates special excitement, even among people who are not normally golf fans. He was also right to talk about the commitment of Paul Lawrie, who has been a longstanding supporter of clubgolf and was involved in it right from the beginning. No one should have any doubts about that kind of commitment, which is very welcome.

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

Patricia Ferguson: I am happy to do so.

Finally, I want to draw the minister's attention to the good motion that George Adam has lodged on fair trade products and the food and drink charter at the Commonwealth games. She might like to say whether there is a similar commitment in relation to the Ryder cup.

Like other members, I look forward to an excellent event next year. I am delighted that so many charities will benefit from the event. We must maximise the economic, social and sporting opportunities. I wish everyone who will be following the tournament, whether they are watching it at Gleneagles or on television, all the joy that such an event can bring. Whoever is chosen for the European team, I wish them every success—and maybe I wish the USA team slightly less success.

16:48

Shona Robison: I thank all members who took part in this largely constructive debate. As members said, David McLetchie would almost certainly have taken part in this debate. He certainly would have wanted to be at the Ryder cup next year. This place is all the poorer for his passing.

I do not want to dwell on Neil Findlay's comments, which were not representative of a debate that has been positive. However, I will give this warning to Neil Findlay: if we are going to debate only things that come in by the tonne in our mailbags, I am afraid that sport would not get much of an airing. I think it is fair to say that the Commonwealth games, the Ryder cup and sport in general are not necessarily what fill members' mailbags, but that does not mean that they are not important for this place.

Large amounts of public money are being invested in events such as the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup, so it is right and proper that people, through this Parliament, are told about what that investment is delivering. I do not believe that Neil Findlay's comments are representative of what Patricia Ferguson believes, as I know that she has a commitment to sport that has been demonstrated over many years. I did not want to let his comments go.

I will try to address the points that have been made as best I can. In her opening speech, Patricia Ferguson raised the issue of the charge for volunteers. I can confirm that charges were levied at Celtic Manor in Wales and when the competition was held in America. Celtic Manor was the start of that charging. It is important that we support our young volunteers who would not otherwise have the opportunity to volunteer at Gleneagles.

I should also say that we are working on a ticketing initiative that will help young people in particular—volunteers and others—to attend the Ryder cup. We will get more details on that later this year. It will be a gift-of-the-games opportunity to make sure that people who would not otherwise get or who could not otherwise afford a ticket for

the Ryder cup will get what will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be part of it.

Before I move on, I say to Patricia Ferguson that I will investigate the fair trade issue in more depth.

Liz Smith made a very good speech about golf in the wider context of the golf tourism strategy. The Ryder cup will certainly help the upturn in European visitors, because many will come over for that event. She also raised the issue of the pathway from clubgolf into clubs. There is about a 15 per cent conversion rate from clubgolf to clubs, which compared with other sports is a very high conversion rate from an introduction to a sport. That is good. However, some clubs are better than others at having a junior membership programme that is affordable—either low-cost or no-cost. The message that we need to get across to clubs is that, if they get that right, they could have lifelong members who join very young and stay at the club loyally for many years. There is always more work that we can do.

Liz Smith: The issue that was being raised by the Scottish Golf Union and others is that if we get youngsters in who pay virtually nothing, they are put off when they are suddenly asked to pay very heavy fees. It is about trying to bridge that gap, looking to the future.

Shona Robison: We are trying to help clubs, particularly smaller clubs. The roving pro initiative helps clubs that do not have a pro there permanently. We hope that having access to a pro in itself will help bring in membership.

We are working very closely with clubs on how they can capitalise on the Ryder cup more generally. As we have heard, a lot of people do not have tickets. If clubs play it right and open their doors and have Ryder cup events, they could well benefit from a general increase in membership. We are supporting them to look at how they can do that.

Liz Smith asked about golf scholarships. We are always looking at other things that we can do and I will certainly take away what she said and consider it.

Graeme Pearson talked about the need for universal access to golf as a sport. Clubgolf has helped to open up golf to kids who might otherwise never have had the opportunity to play it. As part of that, a social inclusion pilot has been undertaken to provide clubgolf with information on how it can increase participation in areas of deprivation where there may not be a family history of playing golf. The results of that will be taken forward.

Scotland is in a fantastic position compared with many other countries throughout the world. Because of our municipal courses, golf is far more

affordable here than it is in many other countries. We should celebrate that fact, although we must be vigilant, and if there is more that we can do, we should certainly do it.

Annabelle Ewing spoke well about the importance of the Ryder cup to the local economy. She also mentioned the local charities that are involved in and will benefit from the event. It is right that there is a good mix of charities. There are four official Ryder cup charities, including Quarriers, which provides care and support for thousands of vulnerable children. That is a really good charity partnership. There are also the Friends of St Margaret's in Auchterarder, Perth & Kinross Disability Sport, and, of course, the McGinley Foundation, which is Paul McGinley's charity. All of that means that some really good work will happen as a legacy of the Ryder cup.

No one would guess that Graeme Dey had been a sports journalist in his past. He made a very good, enjoyable speech, in which he took us back through all of the magical moments of the past few years.

Aileen McLeod talked about some of the fantastic new talent that is emerging. I saw that for myself at Gleneagles this week, when the Ryder cup captains teamed up with clubgolf players whose talent had emerged through the clubgolf structure. They were fascinated by the skill that those young players—particularly the girls, I have to say—were showing on the course. I predict—I think that it has already been said today—that, at some point in future, we will see an open champion emerge who started their career in golf through clubgolf. That will be a tremendous thing to see.

We have a magnificent opportunity next year to capitalise on the Ryder cup, and a lot of work and effort is going into ensuring that we do so. I always believe that the best legacies start early. It was due to the foresight of predecessors that the opportunity was spotted to start that legacy early through the clubgolf initiative. The fact that by 2018 half a million children will have been introduced to the sport is something of which all of us can truly be proud.

I thank everyone who took part in the debate. It has been a positive debate and a good afternoon.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-07799, on the variation of standing orders.

16:58

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): The motion would allow the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing to hold meetings at 1 o'clock on a Thursday, even if members' business has not concluded. On a number of occasions, members' business on a Thursday has been so interesting and well-subscribed that it has overrun well past the usual time of 1 o'clock. That causes difficulty for the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, which is scheduled to meet at 1 o'clock and has to wait until members' business has concluded before being allowed to start its meeting.

In looking at this request from the sub-committee, the bureau was clear that we respect the time in this Parliament for plenary sessions. That includes members' business. Therefore, while we have accepted the sub-committee's request, we have put a time limit on the change of 20 December 2013.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing can meet, if necessary, at 1.00pm on a Thursday until 20 December 2013 for the purpose of conducting a meeting of the sub-committee and that any meeting held under this rule is concluded before the commencement of a meeting of the Parliament that afternoon.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister, for moving motion S4M-07799 on the variation of standing orders.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We now move to decision time.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-07808.1, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-07808, in the name of Shona Robison, on one year to go until the Ryder cup, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S4M-07808, in the name of Shona Robison, on one year to go until the Ryder cup, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes Scotland's preparedness for the 2014 Ryder Cup, which will take place in one year's time; commits to supporting a lasting legacy in terms of education, volunteering, infrastructure, tourism and sport; believes that the Ryder Cup should be used as a catalyst for increasing participation in the sport by all age groups; notes the initiative from the Scottish Government and previous Scottish administrations for the successful bid and the investment in Clubgolf and golf tournaments; believes that such cross-party and cross-administration support firmly sets Scotland as the home of golf, and considers that the Ryder Cup is an excellent example of the way in which sport brings nations together.

Meeting closed at 17:00.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78351-742-8

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78351-758-9

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
