



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 18 September 2013

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

1. Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing last met NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and what issues were discussed. (S4O-02382)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Ministers and Government officials regularly meet national health service boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to discuss matters of importance to local people.

Hanzala Malik: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the shocking results of the survey that was carried out by the Royal College of Nursing Scotland, which revealed that patients were being cared for in cupboards, in offices and in dining areas last year due to lack of space. Can he guarantee that that is not happening now and will not happen anywhere in Glasgow or Scotland in the future?

Alex Neil: Obviously, we take any such complaints very seriously. In Glasgow and throughout the health service in Scotland, we immediately take action to ensure that, where something has gone wrong or should not have happened, it does not happen again. We have certainly done that in this case.

Health Visitors

2. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that all families with children up to two years old have regular access to a health visitor. (S4O-02383)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Following a birth and for the first five years of a child's life, all families receive universal services and contact from health visitors and/or the health visiting team. Contacts include child health reviews completed by health visitors or general practitioners and home visits by health visitors and/or a member of their team. Services include a number of home visits in the first year of a child's life and a full family assessment and child

development review at 27 to 30 months, which is undertaken by the health visitor.

Liz Smith: At yesterday's Education and Culture Committee, and also today at the Finance Committee, the Royal College of Nursing put on record its belief that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill is a wonderful opportunity to expand health visiting. It claims that in the region of 450 new health visitors are needed. Does the Government agree with that, and what costs will that incur?

Michael Matheson: Most members recognise that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill provides us with a good opportunity to expand the range of ways in which we help to support and develop children and young people in Scotland. We are undertaking work at present to review the existing arrangements for health visitors and the number of health visitors that we have, including our public health nurses, to see how we can use them much more effectively. I do not doubt that health visitors have an important part to play.

Since 2007, there has been a 13 per cent increase in the number of health visitors in Scotland. However, we see health visiting as a key part of ensuring that we continue to develop the range of services that our children and young people require, which is why we are reviewing current numbers to see how we can take that forward in future years.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): If we are to see an increase in the number of health visitors, we must ensure that they are targeted at the communities that need them most. What mapping is being done to see where health visitors are and what services they provide?

Michael Matheson: We are already aware of the services that health visitors provide by the nature of their job. However, there is patchiness in how different boards operate their health visiting teams. Some of the work that we are doing with boards just now provides them with guidance on how they should take forward their home visiting programme so that we can get a greater consistency of approach across the country. Work on the guidance will continue over the next couple of months. Alongside that, the children, young people and families nursing advisory group is reviewing Scotland's health visiting capacity overall to see how we must develop it in the future to ensure that we build on the progress that has been made since 2007, which has seen a 13 per cent increase in the number of health visitors in Scotland.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I have the answer that the minister gave to Liz Smith, but what precise assessment has the Government made of how many extra

health visitors are needed for two of its policies—having a health visitor as a named person for all young children and the admirable policy of having checks for all children at two and a half years?

Michael Matheson: We have already set out the programme for the checks at 27 to 30 months, which has been done within the existing capacity of health visiting. However, as I mentioned in my previous answer, the children, young people and families nursing advisory group is reviewing Scotland's capacity for health visiting to see where we might have to add to it in years to come in order to meet any growing demand that might arise.

NHS Boards (Openness)

3. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the effectiveness of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's letter of 22 February 2013 to national health service boards encouraging them to support a culture of openness among staff. (S4O-02384)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government continues to encourage and promote a culture of openness whereby NHS staff are actively encouraged and supported to raise any concerns about practices in NHS Scotland. My letter of 22 February reaffirmed the Scottish Government's position on that matter.

We continue to work closely with employers and the staff side to ensure that staff are engaged and involved in any decisions that might affect them. That includes influencing all partnership policies, which underpin the staff governance standard. That ensures that all staff are empowered and involved in shaping Scotland's NHS within a culture that is open and fair.

Ken Macintosh: The cabinet secretary told us about his letter in response to questions from my colleague, Jackie Baillie, about the use of compromise agreements within the NHS in Scotland. Clearly, it has not had the desired effect, as my research has found that, in the past year, the NHS in Scotland has spent £3.5 million on those secret agreements, which is more than the total that was spent on them in the previous five years. How does the cabinet secretary intend to follow up on the letter, as it is clearly not creating the transparency that we want to have?

Alex Neil: The member should do a bit more research, because there is clearly a difference between gagging orders in respect of such documents and other aspects that might remain confidential. Often for very good reasons, it is agreed—or, indeed, requested by the individuals concerned—that certain aspects relating to a

person's departure should remain confidential. Those reasons might involve pension arrangements or a host of other issues. The important point is that such arrangements are not a cloak for gagging orders. Under my predecessor, we put an end to gagging orders, which were rife during the previous Administration.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Members across the chamber will know that many staff are concerned and frightened at their work, with increasing pressure being put on them every day. Cases of bullying and harassment are a serious issue.

Previously, the cabinet secretary has told us that the whistleblowers helpline would be printed on NHS payslips. When will that happen?

Alex Neil: It has already happened.

Carer's Assessment (Stroke Patients)

4. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that people who care for stroke patients are given a carer's assessment. (S4O-02385)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): We recognise the importance of the carer's assessment in enabling local authorities and carers to jointly assess a carer's need for services.

Local authorities have a legal duty to notify carers who provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis that they might be eligible for a carer's assessment. An assessment must also be carried out at the request of the carer.

Later this year, the Scottish Government will be publishing practice guidance on carrying out assessments. That will be widely available to local authorities and health boards.

Anne McTaggart: Recent studies have recognised that depression and a range of other mental health conditions are often consequences of stroke for stroke survivors and their carers. In light of that fact, will the minister advise the chamber of the progress that has been made in assisting the thousands of primary carers who are both suffering from and supporting others who are in significant psychological distress?

Michael Matheson: A range of measures have been taken to help to support carers in Scotland. Our carers strategy and our young carers strategy were published in 2010 and run to 2015. We have also provided a range of different funding streams to support greater information for carers. For example, we have invested £13 million in the carers information strategy, which is being delivered by NHS boards. In the member's region, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has received more than £1 million from that fund this financial

year to help to provide further information. In the period 2010-15, we will invest some £70 million in other areas of support for carers. That aside, we have also been working with stakeholders on the provision of a range of short breaks for carers.

Many of those things can be delivered only in part by Government. Local authorities have a key role in meeting the needs of carers, as do our health boards. Local authorities must recognise their important role in identifying carers and assessing them to deliver the services that they require. I call on local authorities throughout Scotland, including the one in Glasgow, to ensure that they provide the carer's assessment to local residents.

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Following the minister's remarks about the importance of local authorities, I bring to his attention just how many of my constituents come to me, as carers, never having been told that they are entitled to a carer's assessment, never mind having had such an assessment. That is under the Labour-controlled East Dunbartonshire Council.

Michael Matheson: As the member will be aware, I have set out the legal responsibility on local authorities to provide the carer's assessment. Everyone will recognise that we owe a great deal to the many thousands of carers in Scotland who daily provide support and assistance to their loved ones. We have a responsibility to do as much as we can to support them in a role that is challenging at times.

That includes Government, and we are taking forward a range of measures to provide that support, as are our health boards. A number of our local authorities are proactive in helping to support carers. I would encourage all local authorities to consider how they can implement good practice in their areas and do the right thing in supporting carers in Scotland.

Free Health Checks (Middle-aged Men)

5. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government to what extent personal circumstances are taken into account when considering middle-aged men for a free health check. (S4O-02386)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of raising awareness of health issues among men and is committed to providing the best possible advice and support through NHS Scotland. Through the keep well programme, men and women aged between 40 and 64 living in the most deprived areas of Scotland are offered a free health check. The health checks are primarily focused on heart disease and its main risk factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking and

diabetes. The checks can last approximately 40 minutes and may explore wider lifestyle issues with the individual, such as employability and benefits support. Over 180,000 keep well health checks have been delivered across Scotland so far.

Kenneth Gibson: I first raised this matter with Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board on 31 May. The answer, which I received on 4 September, completely missed the point. A constituent of mine called the free health check number. He was asked for his postcode, only to be told that he did not qualify. He was not asked whether he smoked, had a history of heart disease, was overweight, was in employment—anything. How can we deliver preventative health measures to difficult-to-reach males when their sole criteria is a person's address?

Michael Matheson: I acknowledge the member's concerns. It is worth emphasising that the keep well health check is targeted at those who live in our most deprived communities, who are at greatest risk of cardiovascular disease. I have outlined a variety of lifestyle factors that could contribute to that. However, a range of services is available in NHS Scotland for patients who may require assistance or support in addressing any other lifestyle issues. I would expect that, in instances in which a patient does not come from one of the geographical areas targeted through the keep well programme, and there are issues that need to be addressed, their general practitioner would consider which measures were appropriate for that individual and would signpost them to the appropriate support services.

PFI Service Charges (NHS)

6. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how much the national health service pays each year in private finance initiative service charges. (S4O-02387)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): In 2012-13, the NHS in Scotland paid £215.1 million in unitary charges under private finance initiative/public-private partnership contracts. Of that, £86.6 million related to service charges and £128.5 million related to financing costs.

Richard Lyle: Does the cabinet secretary share my concern about the figures and recognise that the money spent on servicing such disastrous contracts, which were agreed under a previous Government, would have been better spent on continuing to improve standards of patient care across the NHS in Scotland?

Alex Neil: I totally agree with the member. This is another legacy of 13 wasted years under the

previous Labour Administration. Even the Tories have abandoned PFI as a way of funding such projects. In Lanarkshire—in the area that the member represents—Hairmyres hospital is probably the worst example of a complete rip-off of the public purse by PFI contractors, probably not just in Scotland but in the whole United Kingdom.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Briefly, Jim Eadie.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the sale of Balfour Beatty Workplace to GDF Suez Energy Services must not have an adverse effect on patients and staff at the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh? Will he join me in seeking assurances from NHS Lothian that the employment and terms and conditions of the staff at the hospital who deliver the vital services involved will be protected?

Alex Neil: Absolutely. I am seeking such assurances and I also seek the assurance that the contractor will in no way hold the public purse or NHS Lothian to ransom in how it handles the situation.

“Review of NHS Pharmaceutical Care of Patients in the Community in Scotland”

7. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish its response to the “Review of NHS Pharmaceutical Care of Patients in the Community in Scotland”. (S4O-02388)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): I will announce imminently the publication of the Scottish Government’s vision and action plan for national health service pharmaceutical care for the next 10 years. I will send a copy to Rhoda Grant as soon as it is published. The vision and action plan will build on the direction of travel of our progressive and developing policy landscape for high-quality and sustainable health and social care and on the comprehensive study on NHS pharmaceutical care of patients in the community that Dr Hamish Wilson and Professor Nick Barber undertook last year. The vision and action plan will be placed on the Scottish Government’s website.

Rhoda Grant: The cabinet secretary knows that the review found that opening pharmacies can have a detrimental impact on general practitioner services in remote and rural areas. Will he therefore place a moratorium on granting licences for new pharmacies in such areas until he has had time to consider, respond to and take action on the back of the review?

Alex Neil: I share the concerns but, under current legislation, I am not allowed to place a moratorium on such matters.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary knows, I wrote to him about the potential impact on GP services of a couple of pharmacy applications in Drymen and Killin. Does he share my concern about the transparency of the process, the geographical parameters and the funding of GP services? I heard what the cabinet secretary said about a moratorium. He might not be able to go that far—and he might want to explain that a bit further—but what else can he do? It is time that we had an answer on the issue.

Alex Neil: I share Bruce Crawford’s concerns, as I do Rhoda Grant’s, about the impact on rural communities. That is why I have decided to review immediately the regulatory framework that supports the pharmacy applications process and the powers that boards are given in relation to dispensing GP practices.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree with the conclusion on page 9 of the review that services should be accessible and that patients should have

“greater ownership of their own care”?

If so, does he agree that community pharmacies should not be hindered from opening because of what has been described as the glacial process of the national appeal panel?

Alex Neil: I am very much aware of the issues that have arisen in North East Fife, as they have in Uist, Killin, Drymen and other parts of the country. I am very sympathetic to the points that members who represent rural areas have raised. Roddy Campbell has made a good point, which we are taking cognisance of.

Female Genital Mutilation

8. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many reports of female genital mutilation have been made to the police by national health service staff since 2005. (S4O-02389)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Three reports of female genital mutilation have been made to the police by NHS staff since 2005.

Jenny Marra: Three reports does not seem very many, as 3,000 women in Scotland are at risk of having their clitoris cut out. The minister will know that girls who are born to mothers whose genitals have been tortured are at very high risk of genital mutilation. Pregnancy screening is a key point for medical staff to identify that risk. What is NHS Scotland doing during pregnancy screening to reduce the risk for baby girls?

Michael Matheson: We are aware that there is a risk of female genital mutilation to approximately

3,000 women in Scotland, and some of the work that we are taking forward includes the new strategy on violence against women, which will be published later this year. That strategy will have a strand on developing this area of work further—in particular to raise awareness and understanding among a range of staff on how we can reduce the risk and identify areas of risk more effectively. Alongside that, the strategy will help to ensure that those members of staff, in particular the staff within our maternity units, are better informed and are in a position where they can make referrals on as and when appropriate.

As I am sure the member will also recognise, it is important that, where a case is identified, the individual is provided with the best possible healthcare. NHS Scotland will ensure that that happens.

Jenny Marra: The experts tell me that asking questions during pregnancy screening is particularly important for identifying the risk. Can the minister assure me that those questions are being asked during the screening?

Michael Matheson: Female genital mutilation will be an important strand of the work that we will take forward through the new strategy on violence against women. Part of that will be to make sure that we have healthcare staff who are properly informed and understand what actions they should take when a case is presented and who, in doing so, also make sure that the woman receives the appropriate healthcare at that point, should there be any requirement for a follow-up.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Vacancies)

9. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde regarding the filling of vacant positions. (S40-02390)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with all health boards on that, and on a number of other matters. The next meeting will be in November, when NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's annual staff projections are reviewed.

Drew Smith: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. I hope that he will be aware of figures that have been released by Unison that indicate that vacancies at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde are at an all-time high; Unison estimates that the board is short of some 1,800 staff. Will the cabinet secretary agree to meet representatives of Unison to discuss the concerns of front-line health service workers, and will he instruct the board at his meeting in November to fill every vacancy as quickly as possible in order to avoid further

detriment to my constituents, whose quality of care is being affected by short staffing?

Alex Neil: One of the reasons why there are more vacancies is because we are recruiting more staff, in particular into nursing and midwifery and consultant positions, including in accident and emergency. By definition, when we increase the number of people who are being employed, there will for a period be an increase in the number of vacancies.

However, I have made it absolutely clear to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and to every other health board that I do not want bank nursing to be a substitute for employing permanent, full-time staff in our hospitals. We must ensure that the staffing levels are appropriate at all times, so I have taken measures to make sure that we closely monitor the situation to ensure that the system of banking is not abused in any way whatever.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): The cabinet secretary, while talking about big numbers just now, will know that sometimes very small numbers matter and that if particular specialist posts remain vacant, as is the case in NHS Lanarkshire, it can create great problems for constituencies and for clients. Is the cabinet secretary able to discuss with NHS Lanarkshire how it can move forward out of that quite unacceptable situation?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, question 9 was primarily about NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. However, it was also about vacant posts, so perhaps you would like to answer the member.

Alex Neil: I, along with my officials, monitor closely the length of time for which there are vacancies in each NHS area by employment category as well as more general total figures. However, I appreciate the point—being a Lanarkshire member myself—about some of the particular issues in relation to NHS Lanarkshire. We have raised those issues with NHS Lanarkshire to ensure that it fills those vacancies as soon as possible.

It has to be said, however, that some shortages do not just relate to Lanarkshire or to Scotland, but are UK-wide shortages of particular skills. A very obvious example is the shortage of paediatric skills that applies right across the United Kingdom. Such strategic shortages present particular challenges but, in general, I absolutely accept the points that have been made by Drew Smith and by Linda Fabiani that we should delay no longer than is necessary the filling of vacancies in the national health service.

NHS Grampian (Meetings)

10. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Grampian and what issues were discussed. (S4O-02391)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Scottish ministers and Government officials meet regularly with representatives of all national health service boards, including NHS Grampian, to discuss a wide range of matters that are of interest to local people.

Maureen Watt: Further to the questions from Drew Smith and Linda Fabiani, the cabinet secretary will be aware of the current problems in NHS Grampian in recruiting for certain specialisms, and the impact of that on waiting times.

Is there a way in which those who are training for medical and nursing posts can be made more aware of the specialisms in which there are vacancies, and directed to those areas? Can that be discussed with the British Medical Association and nursing unions to see whether we can get people into specialisms in which there are vacancies?

Alex Neil: We take the issue very seriously. Our 2020 workforce vision specifically addresses the question of how we fill vacancies and tackle issues around strategic shortages. Sir David Carter, who is the chair of the board for academic medicine, and his committee are also looking at the issue to consider the link between throughput of training and the need to fill, in the medium term, a number of strategic shortages.

NHS Grampian is experiencing particular pressure in rheumatology, and has recently secured a locum rheumatologist. He will start in early November and will contribute to solving the waiting-time difficulties, of which I know Maureen Watt is aware and which a number of members from Grampian have raised with me.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): On a different note, will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating those who are about to graduate as the first physician associates in the pilot programme that is being run jointly by NHS Grampian and the University of Aberdeen? How does he intend to promote the programme throughout Scotland?

Alex Neil: Absolutely, I will join Nanette Milne in congratulating the first graduates in Scotland to become physician assistants. From my experience in NHS Lanarkshire, I know that physician assistants have already been operating in a number of areas and making a substantial contribution. They have tended to be recruited

from the United States, where use of physician assistants is widespread and is viewed as a major way to provide enhanced quality and safety in healthcare throughout the system.

Meningitis B Vaccine

11. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Joint Committee on Vaccination & Immunisation's decision not to recommend the introduction of the meningitis B vaccine. (S4O-02392)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): As we do with all new vaccines, we will take advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination & Immunisation on the use of that particular vaccine. Meningitis B is a devastating disease, and I am keen that we take appropriate steps to tackle it. Nevertheless, it is important that we fully understand how effective any new vaccine will be before we consider introducing it in Scotland. The JCVI is currently consulting further on the use of the vaccine, and I await its final recommendations following that process, after which we will carefully consider its advice.

Joan McAlpine: I have constituents who have lost children to that terrible disease, and who are disappointed with the JCVI's initial decision not to recommend the vaccine. If that decision is not reversed, could Scotland consider acting alone in vaccinating children against meningitis B?

Michael Matheson: I recognise the devastating impact that the condition can have on families, so it is important that we look at progressing a range of measures to try and prevent it in the future.

As Joan McAlpine may be aware, the JCVI made an interim statement in July this year on its position on the new vaccine. It is consulting further on the issue at present, and I understand that it is due to consider the matter again at its next meeting on 2 October. We expect then to receive further advice from the committee, at which point we will consider what further action may be necessary here in Scotland.

Joan McAlpine specifically asked whether we could take action ourselves. The JCVI is there to advise Government; however, it is for the Government to take the final decision. It is important that we ensure that we consider all the expert opinion and advice on the matter before we come to any final decision.

Treatment Room Services (Hamilton)

12. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the effectiveness of the Douglas Street treatment suite in Hamilton and

whether NHS Lanarkshire plans to introduce similar services elsewhere. (S4O-02393)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Statutory responsibility for service provision rests with national health service boards, so the issue is primarily an operational matter for NHS Lanarkshire. The aim of NHS Lanarkshire's review of treatment rooms is to provide a high-quality, standardised and equitable service for all its patients—an aim that the Scottish Government supports.

NHS Lanarkshire advises that the Douglas Street treatment suite has increased the number of available appointments for patients and has enabled district nurses to spend more time caring for vulnerable housebound patients. Apparently, feedback received by NHS Lanarkshire from patients has been broadly supportive. However, I am aware of the concerns of a number of Lanarkshire members and I have asked NHS Lanarkshire to look at the matter to address the concerns of patients and their representatives.

Michael McMahon: Clearly, the cabinet secretary is aware of the concerns of patients and general practitioners in Hamilton that the centralisation of treatment at the Douglas Street centre has created more problems than it has benefits for patients. If such a model has the Scottish Government's support, why will the cabinet secretary not just admit that to the people of Hamilton? Does he also support the rolling out of that model across the rest of Lanarkshire? The Minister for Public Health intervened to ensure that NHS Lanarkshire reversed its plans on mental health services—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must hurry.

Michael McMahon: So why will the cabinet secretary not intervene now rather than claim that he has no power to intervene in relation to treatment centres?

Alex Neil: I have made it clear that I am very well aware of the concerns of patients and their representatives, including GPs. I remind the member that, as I am sure he knows, NHS Lanarkshire reviewed all treatment room services in 2010—three years ago—and the proposals have been phased in across Lanarkshire. Hamilton was the last area to be taken forward, and a decision is yet to be taken with regard to the site for the treatment room suite for outer Hamilton practices. As I have said to the member, I am seeking assurances—and, where appropriate, action—from NHS Lanarkshire to address the specific concerns that patients, GPs and others have raised about that service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a brief supplementary from Margaret Mitchell.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Given the difficulties associated with access and the level of concern about the relocation of services to the Douglas Street clinic, local residents have proposed an alternative whereby a shared treatment room service could be established at either the Low Waters medical centre or the Cadzow health centre to better serve the 10,000 patients in the local area—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I need a question.

Margaret Mitchell: Will the cabinet secretary encourage NHS Lanarkshire to look at that proposal?

Alex Neil: As I have made clear, I have asked NHS Lanarkshire to address the concerns that have been raised. Obviously, if there is an alternative proposal, NHS Lanarkshire should at least give it some consideration.

NHS Continuing Care Beds

13. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will extend the inspection of older people's care programme to include national health service continuing care beds. (S4O-02394)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Decisions regarding the older people's care in acute hospitals inspection programme are a matter for Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Currently, its programme of work is focusing on acute care.

Across Scotland's 14 territorial national health service boards, there are 23 acute hospitals that are subject to inspection against a range of priority areas. To date, including the inspection of NHS Forth Valley whose results were announced this morning, there have been 17 inspections across 11 health board areas. The future of inspection and scrutiny within the NHS is constantly reviewed by the Scottish Government and Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Malcolm Chisholm: Does the cabinet secretary not think that there is a glaring gap between the inspection of older people in acute care, which Nicola Sturgeon instituted, and the inspection of older people in care homes, which a previous health minister started? Is it not time for the cabinet secretary to take action and responsibility to ensure that frail older people who spend all their time in NHS continuing care beds also benefit from having a rigorous inspection regime?

Alex Neil: First, let me say to Malcolm Chisholm that patients throughout the national health service in Scotland benefit not just from the particular quality objectives but from the requirements of the patient safety programme, which has been

described by Professor Don Berwick as the best in the world. Those patients include the people that Malcolm Chisholm referred to.

I accept that there is a need to take a strategic approach to the future, given the doubling of the number of older people aged over 75 over the next 20 years. I do not believe that the issue is as narrow as Malcolm Chisholm identified. With the emphasis on treating people at home, we also need to look at the future quality and safety issues and inspection issues in caring for people in their own homes, and we are looking at that as a strategic issue. Obviously, I am happy to meet the member to discuss his ideas on the matter.

Waiting Times (A and E Departments)

14. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what recent action it has taken to reduce waiting times at accident and emergency departments. (S4O-02395)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government has introduced a national improvement programme to support improvements in unscheduled care across NHS Scotland. An expert group identified five key themes of activities that will lead to improved sustainable performance: getting emergency patients to the care that they need; promoting senior decision making; assuring effective and safe care 24/7; making the community the right place; and improving the primary care response.

In June 2013, all national health service boards, including the Scottish Ambulance Service and NHS 24, submitted local unscheduled care action plans that describe the whole-system approaches and changes that the boards will implement across those five key themes. The plans and trajectories for improved performance have been reviewed and evaluated, and further revenue of circa £6.3 million has been released this month to support early action towards further improvement in winter planning and sustainability.

Alex Johnstone: I wish the cabinet secretary luck with that, but the target of 98 per cent of patients being seen within four hours was missed significantly in June this year, with the figure at 94.6 per cent. That was down on the figure for June 2012 of 95.1 per cent. Before the cabinet secretary delivers standard answer number 3 from the Scottish National Party bumper book of ministerial excuses, I remind him that those figures are worse than the figures south of the border. Why is his Government failing?

Alex Neil: First of all, the figures are not worse than those south of the border. The difference between us and south of the border is that our

figures are improving, whereas figures south of the border are getting worse, because the priority there is to privatise the health service. That is not a priority north of the border. As the member should know, our interim target is 95 per cent, which we are achieving, more or less—

Alex Johnstone: More or less!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, Mr Johnstone.

Alex Neil: Well, we are. I think that 94.6 per cent is near enough to 95 per cent, and I assure the member that we are heading towards 98 per cent. Under previous Administrations, the figure was not even measured, except on one occasion, which was in the last year of the Lib-Lab pact in Scotland, when the figure was 86 per cent. So we are doing very well, thank you.

Bowel Cancer

15. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle bowel cancer. (S4O-02396)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): We know that the earlier a cancer is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat, which is why, through the £30 million detect cancer early programme, we have introduced a HEAT—health improvement, efficiency and governance, access and treatment—target to increase the proportion of Scots who are diagnosed in the earliest stages of cancer by 25 per cent, initially focusing on breast, lung and colorectal cancers.

To support the programme, we launched the detect bowel cancer early social marketing campaign in February 2013, which highlighted the national bowel screening programme. That activity was backed by extensive public relations, field and partnership activity. In addition, we have introduced a new two-year primary care initiative to facilitate informed uptake of the national bowel screening programme at general practitioner practice level. Healthcare Improvement Scotland is undertaking a refresh of the Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer.

George Adam: How many men have benefited from the national bowel screening programme since its inception in 2007?

Michael Matheson: In total, 1.95 million people in Scotland have so far taken up the screening programme since it was introduced in 2007. Of those, 896,724 males have participated in the programme, which has resulted in diagnosis of some 1,692 bowel cancers in men. That is an uptake of almost 52 per cent. It is an important element of the detect bowel cancer early programme that we continue to increase the number of men who participate in the screening

programme because, in doing so, we can diagnose bowel cancer at a much earlier stage.

Scotland's Future

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-07721, in the name of Alex Salmond, on Scotland's future.

14:40

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): It will give me enormous pleasure to move the motion in my name. In exactly a year's time, the people of Scotland will choose whether to become an independent country. It is a precious thing for any country to be able to decide its own future through a democratic vote, following a free debate. That places a responsibility on each and every one of us.

When this Parliament was reconvened in 1999, Donald Dewar said in what, in my estimation, was his best-ever speech, that devolution was

"about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are, how we carry ourselves."

How we carry ourselves—how we conduct the arguments—will be more important than ever over the next 12 months. Both the yes and the no sides must live up to the standard set by the Edinburgh agreement, an agreement that brings credit to both the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government. The debate over the coming year must be respectful as well as vigorous, constructive as well as passionate, and influenced by empathy, not enmity. That is the best possible way of ensuring that Scotland emerges next September as a stronger nation. Although both sides will ask searching questions of the other, it is important for both sides—actually, it is incumbent on them—to set out a positive vision. History tells us that fearmongering is likely to be counterproductive.

It is interesting to look back at some of the rhetoric about devolution in 1997. The week before that referendum, a Conservative leader called William Hague—I wonder what happened to him—came to Glasgow to predict:

"devolution would make no difference to schools, to hospitals, to jobs or to business. The tartan tax would lead to foreign investors saying no to Scotland."

Those fears were wrong—100 per cent wrong. Investors have not said no to Scotland; Scotland has led the rest of the UK at attracting foreign investment. Far from making no difference to schools, hospitals, businesses and jobs, devolution has helped us to reintroduce free prescriptions and to safeguard the national health service as a public asset, saving it from the chaotic fragmentation of the health service in England. Under this Parliament, employment is higher and unemployment is lower than in the rest

of the UK. The Scottish Government has used its powers to create the most business-friendly local tax environment in these islands.

We are getting similar scare stories at the moment. George Osborne repeated the inward investment scare just a year past November. Using the full authority of his office as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he said that he knew that even holding a referendum would put off investment. More than a year later, we have had a record year for inward investment and are outperforming the UK as a whole.

There was an even less successful claim over the summer that mobile phone charges would go up in an independent Scotland, a claim published on the very day that the European Commission set about abolishing roaming charges across Europe. When we hear such stories, it is worth remembering why William Hague and other opponents were so wrong in 1997. They were wrong because they believed that the people of Scotland would make choices that were harmful to Scotland. The record of the Parliament proves exactly the opposite. It has shown that the best people to take decisions on Scotland's future are the people who live and work in Scotland.

At present, however, decisions affecting Scotland in far too many areas are taken by a Westminster Parliament that has 59 Scottish members out of a total of 650. That democratic deficit affects the public services, employment opportunities and life chances of people across the country.

Just last week, the UK Government introduced its plans for Royal Mail privatisation, plans that were opposed by 80 per cent of MPs in Scotland. The bedroom tax was opposed by 90 per cent of Scottish MPs, yet it threatens to penalise 80,000 households in Scotland, 80 per cent of which include people with disabilities. Last week, it was condemned by the special rapporteur for the United Nations. The Conservative Party chairman said that it was disgraceful that the rapporteur was commenting. The disgrace is that she had to comment in 21st century Scotland.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The approach of "empathy, not enmity" does not appear to have lasted long.

The First Minister suggested that

"an independent Scotland will not inherit any share of the UK's debts."

Does he think that that was a smart thing to say? Does it remain Scottish Government policy?

The First Minister: First, I do not think that commenting on what the United Nations rapporteur has said is introducing antipathy into

the debate; it is the bedroom tax that is introducing antipathy into the debate.

The point that I made, which I will make again, is that if the UK chancellor insisted on the current position of claiming all the monetary assets of the UK, it follows from the Vienna convention and every argument that he would also lay claim to all the liabilities of the UK.

However, if a process of more reasonable negotiation were to take place, and even if Scotland were to finance our population share of that national debt, as a range of reports point out, our debt as a percentage of gross domestic product would be less than that of the UK. That is one of the strengths of Scottish independence.

The bedroom tax is now a totemic issue, just as the poll tax was a totemic issue in the 1990s, when it became a symbol of why devolution was necessary. The UK Government is implementing the bedroom tax at the same time as it is starting to replace the Trident missile system, at an estimated lifetime cost of £100,000 million. Instead of paying for and hosting Trident while mitigating the effects of the bedroom tax, why do not we as a country remove Trident, abolish the bedroom tax and get on with building a better society for ourselves?

A crucial point to make is that no one now seriously doubts that Scotland could be an independent, economically successful country. Even David Cameron—our leading opponent—put it well when he said:

"Supporters of independence will always be able to cite examples of small, independent and thriving economies ... such as Finland, Switzerland and Norway. It would be wrong to suggest that Scotland could not be another such successful, independent country."

Of course, he omitted to mention that Finland's GDP per head is 5 per cent higher than the UK's, that Switzerland's is 45 per cent higher and that Norway's is more than 70 per cent higher. For each of the past 32 years—in every one of those years—Scotland has paid more tax per head of population than the rest of the UK has done. Excluding oil, our national income is on a par with that of the UK. Including oil, our GDP per head is 18 per cent higher than the UK's.

Why should it be otherwise? We are a country rich in natural resources, with world-class universities, an outstanding visitor industry, expertise in engineering and life sciences, an astounding cultural heritage and a skilled and inventive people.

Our case is that independence lets us build on those advantages. We have the opportunity to make Scotland fairer, unhindered by a Westminster system that has created one of the largest gaps between rich and poor in the

developed world. We gain the ability to create our own welfare policies that make work pay while respecting our commitment to fairness and solidarity. We gain control over capital borrowing, economic regulation, competition policy, tax policy and energy policy, which are the very levers that we need to make Scotland more competitive and more prosperous. We gain our own voice in the United Nations, NATO and the European Union but, like 25 out of 28 NATO countries, we will not need to host nuclear weapons and, like 27 out of 28 EU countries, we do not intend to hold an in/out referendum on membership. We gain the right to decide taxation and welfare, which are powers that other countries use in a co-ordinated fashion to strengthen their childcare support.

The support that we provide for parents and young people could match the very best in Europe. This morning, the Deputy First Minister and I went to a centre that is run by North Edinburgh Childcare, which provides care and learning for young people from the age of four months to five years. It is an inspirational example of how quality childcare helps parents—especially women—into work, as well as promoting the wellbeing of children and families.

Under devolution, we have already announced that we will fund 600 hours a year of early learning and childcare for all three-year-olds and that, crucially, we will fund it properly. However, we are doing that in the context of UK policies—the working tax credit and child tax credit—that, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, could see an additional 50,000 children in Scotland living in relative poverty by 2020.

It is a perfect illustration of the question that this country faces. Why ask Westminster to change course and why mitigate UK policies when we have the skills, the resources and the opportunity to decide these things for ourselves?

I have already talked about the devolution referendum of 1997. At that time, nobody knew for sure what a future Scottish or Westminster Parliament would choose to do. Nobody predicted—in fact, nobody could even have imagined—some of the decisions made by successive Westminster Governments. We did not foresee the illegal invasion of Iraq, the fragmentation of England's national health service or the harshness of the welfare cuts that would hit the poorest and most vulnerable. Nobody knew—because it had not been elected yet—what our devolved parliament would choose to do.

So the 1997 referendum was not a vote for homelessness legislation, a climate change act or free university and college tuition; it was a statement of confidence in Scotland's ability to make these decision for ourselves. Independence is about giving ourselves the power to make our

country as good as it can be; it is about the right to decide and the ability to make choices. This Government's argument—our fundamental and most important contention—is that the people who live and work in Scotland are the people most likely to make the right choices for Scotland. That argument is not subject to statistical manipulation, it is not for a day's headlines and it is not born of fear; it is a commonsense position based on our experience.

We have been on a constitutional journey in Scotland for more than a century, and it has taken many forms as, progressively, we have moved forward together as a country. Twice before the matter has been put to a referendum and twice the people have voted in favour, once narrowly and then decisively. The essence of that assent from the people has been the people of Scotland expressing confidence in the ability of this ancient nation to take decisions for itself.

That is why independence is the best route not just to becoming a more prosperous country but to becoming a more just society. That is why, exactly a year from today, the people of Scotland will claim that opportunity with both hands.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that Scotland has an abundance of resources and talent and can more than afford to be a successful, thriving independent country; notes that successive UK administrations have pursued an economic policy that has led to the UK having one of the most unbalanced and unequal economies in the developed world; agrees that it is wrong and costly for policies to be imposed on Scotland that have been overwhelmingly rejected by Scotland's political representatives, and welcomes evidence that shows that there are gains for families and communities when decisions about Scotland are taken by those who care most about Scotland, the people who live and work here.

14:52

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I am proud to rise and speak to the amendment in my name. Indeed, it is because I am a proud Scot, not despite it, that I support Scotland's remaining strong in the United Kingdom. My head tells me that it is right but my heart, too, cries out for co-operation, not division.

Over the next period, we can argue about individual figures, but I want to make a number of points about the substance underpinning this debate. I will reflect on a number of the false premises that underpin the nationalist position and then speak about my vision for the people of Scotland and across the UK—a vision of a politics that is rooted in the real world, not entirely detached from it.

The nationalists' central argument is that, by definition, decisions made about Scotland in

Scotland will always be better. However, that argument points to Scotland leaving not only the United Kingdom but Europe, the United Nations and NATO. If only Scotland can decide, no power to make decisions can rest anywhere else but in Scotland—and that is a self-evident nonsense.

Last week, Alex Neil told us that our constitutional argument was like that in South Africa and India, but our relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom is not a colonial one and ought not to be characterised in such terms. We are told that we are different and that our concerns and priorities are different from those in the rest of the United Kingdom but, as we know, families across the United Kingdom are worried about jobs, their children's education, their elderly parents' care and making the world a safer place. There is more that binds us together than will ever divide us.

The First Minister: Earlier today—and I have the quotation here—Johann Lamont herself made the argument for Scottish decision making. She said about the Scottish Parliament:

"What it did teach us is that if power is too far away from you, if you don't have to look in the eye of those who you are making decisions that will affect them, then you will make decisions that will very often damage them."

Would it not be better if the people making social security decisions and introducing the bedroom tax had to look in the eye of the Scottish people at the moment?

Johann Lamont: I thought that I made an excellent point, but obviously the First Minister, as ever, missed it. He is saying that all decisions have to be made here, but we have the right to make decisions where decisions lie. The logic of the First Minister's position is that we would not be in Europe, the United Nations or anywhere else.

There is an assumption that the rest of the United Kingdom wants to deny us our rights and potential, that Scots are more progressive, fairer and more generous, and that, if only we could rule ourselves, all the ills of society would disappear. That complacency and that belief that there are inevitable differences denies the need to reaffirm every day the importance of fairness, justice, respect and compassion, and insults all those radical voices right across the United Kingdom who are as concerned as we are about what is happening in the country. Only the Scottish National Party could look at the record of Labour Governments in creating the NHS, developing the welfare state, opening up educational and economic opportunity, tackling child poverty and supporting people into work, say that there is no difference between Labour and the Tory party, and then say that it offers a promise of a better world that is funded by cuts in corporation tax to 3p

lower than anything that a Tory chancellor would offer.

The truth is that, regardless of economic circumstances, on high days and holidays, in good times and bad, the SNP holds on to its belief in independence. That is not a response to the banking crisis, foreign wars or a Tory Government; it is the politics of nationalism looking for a justification—a belief that is held when all else changes, regardless of what the evidence says. I changed my mind in the 1980s when I saw what Thatcher was doing to children whom I taught, but I know that Alex Salmond has been on no constitutional journey. He believed in independence 40 years ago and he believes in it today.

The SNP says that it speaks for Scottish values, but the values of community, co-operation, being a good neighbour and solidarity are embodied in the United Kingdom, not repudiated by it. The SNP often tells us to look at our history, but it is too often guilty of rewriting our history. An understanding of our history makes me a socialist, not a nationalist. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Johann Lamont: Alex Salmond looks at the Parliament of 1707 and says, "This Parliament is reconvened." This Parliament, with a democratic suffrage, has nothing to do with that of 1707, and anyone who does not see that does not understand. It was not the common identity of crofter and landowner that drove land reform; it was the struggle of land leaguers such as my great uncle, who demanded that they have the right to have control over the land that they worked. It was not the common Scottish identity of trade unionists and factory owners that challenged exploitation and danger in the workplace; it was the coming together of working people across the United Kingdom in the Labour and trade union movement to demand protection and rights in the workplace. It is not the common identity of Scottish men and Scottish women that has seen women's lives transformed in the past century in the home, in the workplace and in education. My daughter's future and her opportunities were shaped by a women's movement that demanded that the way things were should change and a Labour movement that delivered in legislation equal rights for women.

I know that there are progressive people in the SNP ranks, but the reality is that the great changes in our history—the steps and progress in the lives of women, people with disabilities and people who have suffered discrimination and disadvantages and on the huge issues of the environment and justice—were won despite nationalism, not because of it. They were driven by a trade union movement determined to make

the world a better place, an environmental movement determined that we would not destroy our planet, the women's movement, the suffrage movement, and people coming together through generations with common interests to make a difference. Change is won not by changing the country's constitutional arrangements, but by winning the argument and proving that we can create a better society.

The constitutional debate is not about which policies we will propose in the general and Scottish elections, and it ought not to be presented in those terms. The constitutional debate is about a once-in-a-lifetime decision to see what our relationship should be with the rest of the United Kingdom.

However, there will be a prize in 2014 when the debate is settled and, in my view, Scotland confirms its place in the United Kingdom, because it will end the political equivalent of having a get-out-of-jail-free card, whereby Scotland, uniquely in the world, does not have to address demographic change in times of economic hardship and ministers always have someone else to blame. Then, we can start dealing with the real challenges of life in modern Scotland, as Alex Bell, whom I think everyone knows, has reflected. We will see an end to the tired and tedious and the old tunes. We can have a Government that says in public what it thinks in private. We can get a Government that respects local democracy rather than one that cuts its funding and then denounces councils that have to live with the consequence of that cut in funding.

There are hard questions. How do we make our public services sustainable and able to meet need rather than that being simply a slogan? How do we keep our older people safe, our youngsters educated and the economy strong when people do not trust politics and the debate on how taxation can be fairly levied to create a strong society can barely even begin? That is the tough politics. That is the argument, rather than our infantilising an electorate into choosing between electoral bribes and believing that it is possible to have everything without it costing anything.

We can get back to the rigour of a Government that looks at the evidence, understands the problem and then makes change happen. That is not what we have now, which is not a Government but a campaign while Scotland is on pause and civil servant brains are applied not to the challenge of climate change and an ageing population but to an imagined world post 2014. We have a Government that is not asking the hard questions on health or education, or on a care service in which a girl of 17, with four days' training, is expected to go out on her own and look after 20 different groups of people; and a Government that

says that it cares about homelessness but no longer even counts the number of people who are rough sleeping on our streets across Scotland.

Since 2011, we have had an obsession with the referendum and we have had more historic days than you could shake a stick at, with the cynicism of promising everyone everything that they want. Let us make the case proudly and stand up for staying in the United Kingdom. Let us refresh the opportunity to defeat nationalism and do the real job of politics: to make and win the political case for the real change that we need to make our society safer, stronger and fairer. Let us have not the tired and tedious and the old songs but honesty, openness and coming together to deal with the real experience of Scots across this country. Let us use the talents of all of Scotland to make sure that Scotland is a better place. Let us have not nationalism but a coming together of the people of Scotland in the United Kingdom to make sure that Scotland is, and not just claims to be, a better and fairer place.

I move amendment S4M-07721.1, to leave out from first "agrees" to end and insert:

"welcomes the people of Scotland having their say on the constitutional future on 18 September 2014; believes that Scotland is best served by a strong Scottish Parliament in a strong UK, and looks forward to a debate over the next year that reflects the priorities of the people and strengthens the position of Scotland as a partner in the UK rather than as a separate state".

15:03

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): In the run-up to today, the year-out point from the referendum, words such as "historic" "generational" and "once in a lifetime" have been regularly sprinkled in newspapers, on television and in interviews—rightly so, because this is an era of big politics in Scotland. We are all blessed to be participants in the discussion surrounding our nation's future, and those who are eligible to vote next September will cast their ballot not just for themselves but for future generations.

We should be proud to be making a mature and democratic choice about the future form that we want our country to take, where we want to stand in the world and, crucially, whom we want to stand alongside. I have said before, and I repeat it, that I doubt neither the sincerity nor the legitimacy of people on the nationalist side of the argument who want Scotland to break away from the rest of the UK and go it alone. I do not share that aim, but I do not question the motives of those who do. That is why I get angry, on behalf of my fellow countrymen who want to continue to be part of a union that we have built, shaped and contributed to for centuries, when we are told that that belief, that continued contribution and that wish to build

something up rather than to break away makes us somehow less Scottish and less patriotic, and that it means that we are doing our country down. It does not.

I believe that Scotland's future will be best served by a strong Scottish Parliament in a strong UK. I believe that the currency union that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister espouse is a poor facsimile of the economic, financial and political union that we already enjoy.

I believe that we are stronger together as part of the United Kingdom armed forces, that Scots around the world who are proud to serve with a union flag on the arm of their uniform are part of the most professional fighting force on the planet, and that our integrated land, sea and air platforms allow us to respond to conflicts and crises in all parts of the globe. I believe that the defence of our allies, our response in the world and the safety and security of our people here at home are best served in that way.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I wonder whether Ruth Davidson is aware that there are fewer men under arms in the British army and other services now than there were at the start of the battle of Waterloo. In a recent news story about Syria, it was reported that the American fifth fleet had been moved into the Persian gulf and the sixth fleet had been moved up to the eastern Mediterranean, while the British had a submarine somewhere off Cyprus. Are we joking about this Great Britain defence?

Ruth Davidson: I believe that our footprint around the world is such that we are in the top three defence forces in the world, given our commitment of gross domestic product to funding our force. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Ruth Davidson: I believe that our future alliances, our future assistance and our future security will be best served by the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force—

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will Ruth Davidson give way?

Ruth Davidson: —and not by the division of personnel, platforms, assets and hardware that separation would entail.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way, Mr Stewart.

Ruth Davidson: If Margo MacDonald is making the point that our footprint is smaller than it once was, in different times of war, to break up our nation and break up that defence footprint is not the answer.

The First Minister talked about the ingenuity of our people. I believe in it, too. I believe in ensuring the greatest opportunity and prosperity for people in the future. We have helped to build a UK economy that is capable not just of withstanding shocks that have holed other European nations, but of long-term growth. We have prospered through our partnership with the other home nations and we continue to do so. Scottish businesses benefit from being part of a single UK market. We export twice as much to England as to any other part of the world—£45.5 billion annually. Over the past decade, the value to Scotland of trade with the rest of the UK has increased by more than 60 per cent.

The First Minister likes to convey a sense that, under independence, everything would change but nothing would change. If we were to leave the United Kingdom, it would inevitably mean different rules on the different sides of the border—there would be different financial regulations, different employment laws, different insurance requirements, different tax authorities and different accreditations and qualifications, and small companies would be obliged to contend with that. Those are all barriers to trade, obstructions to economic growth and impediments to the job creation that we all want.

In financial services, nearly 400,000 products, a fifth of a million Scottish jobs and nearly £10 billion of financial service exports are built on doing business within the single UK market. Our manufacturers are part of a 60 million person market, our exporters use our embassy and consular network as a platform for trade, and our individual workers have saved for a future and retirement in which they see stability and security as part of the UK.

I expect to be shouted down by the other side when I ask questions about what independence would mean. I expect to be flannelled when I ask questions that the First Minister does not want to answer. I expect a change of subject when I ask for evidence to support the latest assertion. That is politics. What I do not expect is the same treatment to be meted out to experts and trade organisations who are not backing one side or the other but are genuinely looking for the answers that their members need in order to make an informed decision about what is an historic choice, a generational opportunity and a world-shaping vote. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, the Confederation of British Industry Scotland and the Law Society of Scotland have all been told, “Don’t worry—it will all be in the white paper.”

People in Scotland need more information on the proposition that is being put to them. The Scottish Government has set a high bar for the

forthcoming white paper, as all the questions from groups and individuals across the country have been disregarded and set aside, with people being told, "It'll all be there." Pensions, welfare, currency, international memberships and treaties, taxation, immigration, defence—we are told that information on all those things will be in the white paper. I truly hope that it is, because we have a year to go.

We want a future in which our countrymen and women have the best chance and there is the greatest opportunity for future prosperity, for jobs, for exports, for defence, for a secure and stable economy and for autonomy here in areas such as health, education and policing.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Davidson, you must end.

Ruth Davidson: I believe in devolution. I believe in a strong Scottish Parliament in a strong UK and that is why I am proud to back the amendment to the motion.

The Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. Speeches are to be six minutes long. I ask members to be as brief as they can.

15:10

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): We live in exciting times. This is a time of potential responsibility and opportunity for our nation, although when people listen to the leader of the Labour Party, they would think otherwise. Ms Lamont states that "Scotland is on pause". I say to Ms Lamont that the Scotland that she wants would be in permanent rewind. She offers no ideas; I am still waiting to hear about the vision that she said she would offer in her speech.

This is one of the biggest opportunities our nation has ever had. With independence, we can talk about what we can do, instead of what we cannot do, and the members of this Parliament can get together to discuss what is best for Scotland and Scotland's people. Instead of blaming others, we will take on the responsibility of government.

I met the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning at breakfast this morning. He quoted from Wordsworth, because he was so excited about today. Of course, I knew exactly where the quote was from, so I instantly googled it. Afterwards, I decided to think about some other things, because the public are listening to our debate and they want to engage with it. They want to find out what independence offers and what the union offers. I believe that the union does not offer us the future that independence offers us, and I have yet to see the case or the vision for retaining the union.

We are talking about the tale of two nations and the tale of two Governments, so it might be a good idea to consider the first lines of "A Tale of Two Cities".

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness ... it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us".

That is exactly what the campaign seems like, as far as the public are concerned. We offer the positive vision for Scotland as an independent nation; the no campaign just comes up with negativity, constantly says the same things and offers the people of Scotland nothing.

We have to be better than that; we are better than that. Members of this Parliament might not agree on party policy and issues, but I think that every one of us became involved in politics to make a difference in our communities. I got involved for the sake of Paisley and the communities in the area, because the two Ps—people and Paisley—are the most important things to me.

Some schoolchildren from Paisley grammar school came here yesterday. They will vote in the referendum because of our policy. One of their teachers asked about independence, saying, "This is the most important question, and these new voters should know about it", so I had a debate about it with the member who was there from one of the parties of the no campaign. The children—I am sorry; they are young people who will be voting—laughed at the member when he told them, "You wouldn't get BBC iPlayer. Scotland can't run its own national broadcaster." When we were talking about culture, he said that a boy who had had a bit part in "Waterloo Road" would not have been able to become an actor, because Scotland would not be able to sustain anything like that. The students of Paisley grammar laughed at that no campaigner, because they could see—

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Name and shame him!

George Adam: No, I will not do that, because he is not here.

One young boy came up to me afterwards and said, in true Paisley fashion, "George—you had him on toast."

During our debate, the same member said, "George has been fighting for this for 40 years." Ms Lamont said something similar about the First Minister. Forty years ago, I was four years old. I have been involved in the campaign for quite a while, but even I was not involved then. Surely we can talk about things more positively. I never tire of talking about the positive case for independence and for our country. That is why I got involved in the campaign 28 years ago, when I

was 16. I was motivated by what was best for my local community during the dim and dark days of Thatcherism.

Margo MacDonald: On the matter of campaigning 40 years ago, I was there. A report then found that one child in 10 was born to fail.

George Adam: I remember hearing about that report. It was one of the things that motivated me to become involved in politics. It is one of the reasons why, in the real world, the policies of the Scottish Government and the Scottish National Party work with the Scottish people. We believe in the same things, and I believe that we can all work together. Time moves forward, but Westminster does not: Westminster remains static.

Let us look at some of the things that the Scottish Government has done with minimal independent powers. We have maintained the council tax freeze; higher education is fees-free; the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 offers access to university to people from all backgrounds; and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill offers 600 hours of childcare. That is just the start. When we get the full levers of independence, we will move things forward.

When we look at the positive results that we could achieve with independence, we must ask ourselves why we are not in charge of our welfare. Why must the no campaign constantly be negative about all the possibilities?

The Presiding Officer: You must bring your remarks to a close, Mr Adam.

George Adam: We have the bedroom tax currently, and Mr Sarwar, the deputy leader of the Labour Party, is constantly making all kinds of accusations, and policy on the hop, on TV stations. He asks, "Why don't we look at the apolitical Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which has said that the powers to address child poverty already exist in the Scottish Parliament?" He said that, but it is not what the Joseph Rowntree Foundation believes.

The Presiding Officer: I really must ask you to close, Mr Adam.

George Adam: I look forward to the day when we can sit in this Parliament and have a proper debate about Scotland's future.

15:17

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I was going to appeal for the debate to reach a new level, but I am afraid that, with that speech, it already has. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Neil Findlay: I do not—and never will—question anyone's commitment to their country or community, and I hope that no one will ever question mine. Opposition to independence is not anti-Scottish, unpatriotic or an act of treachery. It is my deeply held view that the SNP's version of independence is fundamentally flawed and absolutely not in the interests of working people in Scotland or beyond our borders. As Alex Bell, the First Minister's former adviser, has said:

"Scotland's problems are common to"

all countries in

"the developed world".

That is very true.

Currently, poverty and inequality in Scotland are at appalling levels. If someone is born into a poor household and community, they are likely to become ill and die sooner than a more affluent Scot who may live in the next street or the next community.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): That is because of the union.

Neil Findlay: No, it is not because of the union. This is what SNP members need to get into their skulls: it is not because of the union; it is because of the system that we operate under. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Neil Findlay: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: It is unusual for a member to make a point of order during his own speech, but please go ahead, Mr Findlay—it is your time.

Neil Findlay: It may be unusual, but I would like to do it. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay wants to make a point of order, and I would like to hear it.

Neil Findlay: When the debate started, the First Minister was heard with courtesy. Since then, Opposition members who have spoken have not been. I wonder whether we can maintain courtesy throughout the debate.

The Presiding Officer: I always suggest that members in the chamber treat each other with courtesy and respect. Everybody would do well to remember that.

Neil Findlay: There is an 11-year gap between the life expectancy of men in the most deprived communities and the life expectancy of those in the most prosperous communities. That scandal will not change simply by the erection of a new border. The fact that, in this day and age, families cannae feed their weans and have to attend food banks to survive is due to Tory welfare cuts.

However, there are things that the Scottish Parliament can do to help with its current powers but the Government chooses not to do them.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Will Neil Findlay give way?

Neil Findlay: No, sit down.

Last month, we saw—

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Findlay, please resume your seat. We have just had an exchange about courtesy and respect. I expect courtesy and respect from every member, including you.

Neil Findlay: Last month, we saw 10,000 more Scots join the dole queue. Some 48,000 fewer young people are attending our colleges, and poverty pay and zero-hour contracts are the desperate norm for many young people. Those are not issues that will be tackled by drawing a new line on a map or swapping one flag for another.

Jamie Hepburn: It is true that a new flag or drawing a line on a map will not allow this Parliament to deal with those matters. However, might not vesting the requisite powers in this place and taking those matters away from the hands of the Tories allow us to deal with them much better?

Neil Findlay: I will come to that point.

Those issues will certainly not be tackled by replacing UK and EU neoliberalism with a more parochial and further entrenched Scottish version, as promoted by the First Minister and his party. That is what is being proposed in the SNP's version of independence. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth regularly reminds us that he wants Scotland to be the most competitive place in Europe. However, in this context, the word “competitive” is a euphemism for low pay, poor conditions and the ripping out of cash from our public services. It will result in hundreds of thousands of pounds being ripped out of schools, roads and hospitals and gifted to corporations in a tax cut. How on earth will that address the inequality and lack of balance in the economy that is mentioned in the First Minister's motion? It is nonsense. The fact is that it will do the opposite.

I know that Mr Swinney, Mr Ewing and Mr Russell support trickle-down economics, but it appears that the famous young radical who we all remember being thrown out of the House of Commons for protesting against Nigel Lawson's corporation tax cut now champions cuts that even George Osborne dare not make.

I would like us to learn from past mistakes. Last week, 25 senior academics, trade union leaders, politicians and activists launched, “Class, Nation

and Socialism—The Red Paper on Scotland 2014”. It is in the Parliament's shop. I recommend that the First Minister get a copy and educate himself. The book promotes a positive agenda for political change in Scotland—one that argues for a major political and democratic reform to free up and re-empower local government so that it can work in the interests of citizens and not just obey the diktat of central Government. It argues for an economy that is more democratic, with forms of social, co-operative and public ownership so that we can balance societal, environmental and economic considerations for the wellbeing of the entire society, with the renewables industry being a prime example of where that can be achieved. It argues for an industrial policy where Government support and intervention create and sustain jobs and investment. The Forth bridge contract is the greatest missed opportunity that we have had in that regard. We need a taxation system that supports and services communities, not financial institutions and transnational companies.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Will Neil Findlay give way?

Neil Findlay: I will not, at the moment.

The Presiding Officer: You must bring your remarks to a close.

Neil Findlay: We need a housing policy that is linked to an industry and employment strategy that drives social justice, and we need a public procurement policy that ensures that companies are given contracts only when they pay a living wage, pay taxes and do not blacklist workers.

Many of those steps could be taken here and now, as well as in the future. I believe that that would best be achieved through enhanced devolution. A race to the bottom in taxes and wages and public services is in no one's interest, least of all the interests of working people who, in the end, will suffer most when the big business agenda that is promoted by the SNP comes to fruition.

15:23

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I was looking forward to this debate on Scotland's future, because it is very welcome on this day, one year before our referendum. I find it exciting because, following the referendum, we will have the opportunity to shape the nation's future in order to help Scotland to achieve its potential. That is such a privilege.

So, why is Scotland not achieving its potential? Scotland is blessed with an ample supply of good-quality land. We have oil and gas reserves worth an estimated £1.5 trillion and our potential for renewable energy is second to none. We produce

renowned food and drinks, we have an educated population, a skilled workforce and a diaspora that has a foothold in every corner of the globe. However, our population is stuck at 5 million—a relative loss that is equivalent to the population of Glasgow at its peak—and, after 40 years, not a penny of oil revenue has been invested for the long term. By contrast, our neighbours have an oil fund of about £100,000 a head.

As Neil Findlay confirmed, successive UK Administrations have made the UK one of the most unbalanced and unequal countries in the developed world. The richest 10 per cent control more than 40 per cent of the wealth and the richest 20 per cent have average incomes 14 times those of the poorest 20 per cent. While Scotland's population stagnates, London and the south booms.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Can Linda Fabiani tell me of a redistributive policy of the current Scottish Government or of the SNP after independence?

Linda Fabiani: Mr Smith has just proved the point that the Labour Party here has no idea what the debate is actually about. It is about their country's future, so Labour members should rise to the challenge of talking about it.

Scotland's GDP per head, excluding oil, is the third highest of any part of the UK, yet we have deprivation that shames our country. All the measures tell the same story, which is that the union is not working for Scotland.

While Scottish Labour helped to privatise England's national health service, we argued for a Scottish welfare system. When Alistair Darling signed off high-speed rail to just north of Watford, we wanted Scotland to control its own resources, and while Gordon Brown funded the Iraq war, we campaigned against nuclear weapons on the Clyde. As the contrast with Norway shows, another future is possible. We can change Scotland for the better if we have the courage.

I was struck by the contrast between two statements. The first is:

"It is by being confident—confident in ourselves, in our communities, and in our values—that we can remain an open, liberal nation."

The second is:

"I'm not quite sure there are unique Scottish values."

The first was Clegg on the UK; the second was Willie Rennie on Scotland. Dare Scotland be confident in itself, in its communities and in its values? Not if the better together campaign has anything to do with it. Labour calls us a "something for nothing society" and the Lib Dems deny us our values and they pretend to offer us a positive vision for Scotland's future.

In asset-rich Scotland, one in five children lives in poverty. There is no prospect of this Parliament, within the UK, getting the powers that it needs to tackle child poverty. How can we say that? It is because—George Adam was right—Anas Sarwar said so on Monday, live on the BBC. According to Scottish Labour's leadership, child poverty in Scotland must be the fault of this Parliament and not of the Tories. How bizarre.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the powers to tackle child poverty reside with Westminster.

Drew Smith: I am sure that Linda Fabiani read the JRF report with interest and is aware that the JRF explicitly said that the debate on independence should not put off a debate about the powers of the Scottish Government that could be used to tackle child poverty, and indicated that the Government had failed to do so.

Linda Fabiani: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation said clearly that the powers to tackle child poverty reside with Westminster. I wish that Labour would stop creating smokescreens for its Tory partners in better together. Does a single figure in the better together parties have the courage to demand additional powers now, in order to let us consider that issue?

I have talked about this many times. Let's face it. We can forget the unionists' promises; they will not deliver. They had the chance during the Scotland Bill to bring welfare to Scotland and to get together and go for it. They have no intention of doing so.

Willie Rennie spoke about more powers. I heard him on the radio talking about a Glasgow agreement. As I said, they had the chance but they did not take it.

There is such a thing as a London agreement. That is legislation. I say to all the people who say that there will be more powers: "Put your money where your mouth is and insist that it's in legislation, because the Tories will never go for it and Labour MPs in the north of England would be off their heads to vote for it."

No one knows today what Scotland's future will be 10, 20 or 30 years down the line. That is up to us next year; a year from now—opportunity, or status quo and decline. What I do know, though, is that the people who are best placed to make Scotland thrive are the people who care most about Scotland—the people who live and work here. I passionately believe that, as I passionately believe that voting yes in 2014 will give the people of Scotland the power to deliver. They will grasp that and they will deliver.

15:29

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): In yesterday's *Scotsman*, Peter Jones reminded us of the interesting distinction that Professor Neil MacCormick made between existentialist nationalists and instrumentalist nationalists. It is fair to say that all the SNP members opposite are existentialist nationalists, in that they will vote for Scottish independence irrespective of the economic arguments for or against it, whereas thousands of people out there—possibly a majority—will base their decision on what they think the economy in an independent Scotland would be like.

It was therefore strange that the First Minister hardly mentioned the economy today. He made three points on it, to which I will refer.

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: Not yet.

Our argument for remaining part of the United Kingdom is based partly on social solidarity with the rest of the UK, partly on believing that strong devolution gives us the best of both worlds and—crucially—partly on the assessment that we have relative economic advantages in being part of the UK. Today's debate and the First Minister's speech seem to be all about something else.

Notwithstanding the fact that he is an existentialist nationalist and so, in a sense, the other arguments do not matter to him at all, the First Minister tried to frame the debate in two ways. First, he tried to undermine any critique of independence and particularly its economics as scaremongering. Secondly, he tried to frame the debate in terms of Scotland versus the Tories. That is why he is interested in debating only with David Cameron. I am sure that lots of us would like to debate with David Cameron and would have quite a lot of easy points to make against him.

The First Minister is not interested in debating with Alistair Darling—

Margo MacDonald rose—

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: In a minute—I need to move on.

Alistair Darling is the perfect person with whom to debate the economics of independence. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Malcolm Chisholm: That is because of his knowledge, his experience and what he achieved, as I shall remind members in a moment—I cannot take interventions until I have done that.

The First Minister made three points about the economy, although one was in response to Gavin Brown. First, we had the selective quotation of facts, which always happens. We were told that, in each of the past two or perhaps three decades, we have paid more tax per head than the rest of the UK. That is of course correct because of oil, which we all welcome but which will not last for ever. However, the SNP never says what the spending was. The fact is that in only six of the past 22 years have Scottish revenues as a percentage of UK revenues been higher than Scottish spending as a percentage of UK spending. The figure this year is quoted, because it happens to be higher, but that has been the case in only six of the past 22 years.

The First Minister talked about control of tax policy, but Gavin McCrone—I recommend that everybody reads his book as the standard one on the economy—makes it clear that the rest of the UK would oversee fiscal policy. All the economists say that—even John Kay and others who are the First Minister's advisers.

The First Minister responded to Gavin Brown's point about the comment that Scotland would not inherit a share of debt, which is absolutely ludicrous, as Scotland would of course inherit a share. The very important point is that long-term interest rates for borrowing would be higher. Even with all the weaknesses and problems of the present UK economy, we have the advantage of low interest rates, which we would not have after 2016.

Mark McDonald: I am interested in Mr Chisholm's reference to our much-missed friend Dr Neil MacCormick. Would he define himself and the Labour Party as existentialist unionists?

Malcolm Chisholm: I have already given the three facts that drive us, which I do not need to repeat.

Margo MacDonald rose—

Malcolm Chisholm: I have only two minutes left.

The economic situation that faces us in 2016 will be crucial to the debate. I wanted to make lots of other economic points, but it has somehow taken me four minutes to say what I have already said.

Even in the current adverse economic circumstances, we have advantages from being part of the UK. Four times as many of our exports go to England as go to the rest of the world put together. We have the advantages of financial services jobs as part of the UK, of twice our

population share of research funding to our universities, and so on.

The argument is partly about social solidarity, as I said, but it is also about pooling risk.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I do not have time.

Alistair Darling was derided by people, but he did many important things as chancellor, one of which was to rescue the Scotland-based banks. I refer again to Professor Gavin McCrone, whom the SNP generally respects. He says that, if we had been independent back in 2008, our finances would have been overwhelmed and, like Ireland, we would have had to seek a bailout from international organisations.

The same principle of pooling risk applies to welfare spending. Currently—even excluding health—Scottish welfare spending is £3,972 per head compared with £3,658 per head in England and our welfare spending is expected to grow more rapidly: because of our demography and the balance of our population, we will have more older people relative to the working age population. It is therefore an advantage for pensioners to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Finally, I am glad that Alex Salmond went with Nicola Sturgeon to the best childcare centre in Scotland—in West Pilton in my constituency—this morning. In the past few months, we have heard a little bit from Alex Salmond about childcare. I did not hear anything from him between 1987 and 2013, while Johann Lamont was talking about it, and I spoke about it in my maiden speech in 1992, but I will pass on that.

The point that I want to make is twofold. First, many of the advances in childcare came from the UK Labour Government. I regret the fact that the current Government has cut the childcare tax credit; it was one of Gordon Brown's great achievements that he instituted the childcare tax credit, which helped many parents afford childcare.

The Presiding Officer: You must bring your remarks to a close, Mr Chisholm.

Malcolm Chisholm: Secondly, the Scottish Government can do far more on childcare now, as it can on other policies. Devolution can do a great deal and more enhanced devolution can do even more—that is the message that I will be speaking about in the next twelve months.

The Presiding Officer: John Mason is next, to be followed by Tavish Scott. I ask members to keep their time to six minutes—the debate is oversubscribed.

15:36

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

We can start off the debate by being extremely positive about Scotland. Lots of good things have happened in Scotland in the past; lots of good things are happening in Scotland in the present; and even the dour pessimists have to accept that a lot of good things will happen in Scotland in the future.

When I moved out of my parents' home in my early 20s, it was not primarily so that I would be better off. In fact, in the short term, I might have been better off staying put and having my bills paid by my father. I moved out so that I could develop more as a person, have the freedom to make my own choices and live my life the way that I wanted to live it. In fact, some of the choices that I have made have been similar to what my parents would have chosen. However, I have no regrets about moving out from home at that time and I believe that many of the good things that have happened to me since then in my life have been because I have been living on my own.

We are asked what exactly Scotland will be like if it is independent, but of course we do not know exactly what the UK or any other country would be like in the future—independent or not—so we cannot spend the whole debate going through the detail of what will and will not happen.

We must not spend too much time getting too bogged down in what the costs and benefits will be in year 1. We need to look at the longer term—we need to look at the bigger picture. We need to look at things such as: how would Scotland's attitude be changed by being independent? How would our confidence—about starting businesses and about lots of other things—be changed by independence? How would our standing in the world be changed by independence—or, as Alex Salmond said, how would we carry ourselves with independence?

I believe that we would benefit from independence in the way that a student invests three or four years of their life in getting a degree. That is a major step and it is a sacrifice to start with, but it is for their benefit in the long run and they do better in the long run.

There is a lot in the motion that we could speak on. I want to focus a little on what the UK has been like in recent years; what it is like now; and where it is going to be in the future.

My first point is that the UK is far too small for the future. Once upon a time, there was a British empire and we could all trade with each other and ignore the rest of the world. Nowadays, however, we have some pretty big countries out there, including China with a population of 1.3 billion, India with 1.2 billion and the United States with

300 million. At 63 million, the UK is at best a medium-sized player.

Whatever happens in the future, we must look beyond the UK. Of course we want good relationships with England, Wales and Northern Ireland, not to mention Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. However, they are not big enough for us to grow our export market and to attract tourists from just those places. We need to be part of something bigger than the UK, and the European Union is the clear answer to that, so that neither Scotland nor the UK stands on its own. However, we want to be in partnership with other countries so that we can stand in the world on equal terms. We must move away from the narrow nationalism and parochialism that we see at Westminster and in the British media and become much more outward looking and international.

If Britain is not the answer for our future, has it been a success until now? We have only to look around us and see. When I have been out round the doors, especially in some of the poorer areas, a lot of people have told me that things are so grim at the moment that they could not be any worse if Scotland was independent. That is not exactly a totally positive vision, but it says something about where a lot of people are. That is the answer to some of the points that Neil Findlay made. The UK has had 300 years to get things right and has failed. How much longer does he want to give it?

Neil Findlay: Does John Mason not realise that, if we simply take a system of economics such as that which operates across the European Union at present and apply it parochially to Scotland, nothing will have changed? In fact, some of the policies that he promotes will make things a whole lot worse for the people whom he is talking about.

John Mason: That is a bit unfair on the European Union, which I would view as considerably less liberal than the UK; some of our slightly better employment legislation has come from Europe in spite of the UK. We can also look at the Nordic countries. My argument is that we must be more outward looking. The UK is far too inward looking, narrowly nationalist and parochial. We want to break away from that, and be a much more outward-looking country.

Britain is one of the most unequal developed countries in the world. Some people have fabulous wealth, while some families are struggling even to feed themselves. We must remember that Westminster was handling the economy and the banks when it all went pear-shaped. Yes, we should focus on the future, but we must also remember the track record of those who got us here.

It is all very well to make assertions that Britain will do better in future, but is there any actual

evidence that that will happen? Will Britain become more equal if we stay there? How exactly will that happen? I do not see much sign of it happening.

What has been the recent history? This largely unequal society of ours hit problems a number of years ago, and we needed some—at least temporary—measures to right the ship. Would we do that by taking at least some money from the rich and powerful as an extra contribution, or would we squeeze those at the bottom a bit harder? I think that most of us would agree that it should not be the latter, but of course that is what happened. How would Britain get out of its problems? It would cut benefits to the poorest.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The member should draw to a close, please.

John Mason: Is there any evidence that Britain will do things differently in future, or is that just an assertion?

15:42

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thought that John Mason's speech was deep on irony, but then I realised that he was being deadly serious.

I was standing in a queue at Heathrow a couple of weeks ago, waiting for the Edinburgh plane home, and a businesswoman turned round and said to me, "So, Tavish, if the SNP has its own way, will I need a passport to get home?" I do not know the answer to that, and nor does anyone. Will I need a passport to visit my daughter in Leeds, or my family in the west country of England? Who knows? The only certain aspect of a yes vote in September 2014 is uncertainty.

The border arrangements between an independent Scotland and England would have to be negotiated, and Scotland would have to negotiate with the rest of the UK on how to enter a country that is the biggest market for our goods, where many of us have family and friends and where so many Scots work. How would that uncertainty be so good for the people of Scotland?

The nationalists assert that those who ask such questions are scaremongering and that a white paper will answer every question, as well as many that have not even yet been asked. Most of us doubt that, but the one certainty is uncertainty.

If the nationalists are asked whether Scotland will keep the Queen as head of state, Mr Salmond says yes—

Richard Lyle: Yes.

Tavish Scott: Another says yes, but on the television this week Ms Hyslop said no, there will be a referendum on the future of the monarchy.

What is to be Scotland's currency? Mr Salmond says that it will be the pound, but the chairman of the yes campaign Dennis Canavan says no, Scotland will have its own currency.

Yesterday, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research said that the additional cost to an independent Scotland of staying with the pound would be 0.72 to 1.65 per cent above UK borrowing costs. Scots with mortgages—millions of us—want a straight answer on that, and on pensions, employment rights and jobs, around which there is more uncertainty.

In every area of policy, independence is a walk in the dark. It is opening a door into a pitch-black room and trying to find the door on the other side. We may never come out, but one certainty is that the door marked "UK" will be locked for ever. There is no way back—on that, I agree entirely with Mr Salmond. It is irreversible.

I do not believe that most Scots will enter that room. For all the faults of our present flawed system of democracy, the majority of Scots—the great majority—will stay with the best of both worlds. Scots want a Scottish Parliament with more powers doing more things but within the larger family of the UK. *[Interruption.]*

I want to see a federal United Kingdom, in which the decisions affecting Wales, Northern Ireland, England and Scotland are taken in those nations but we come together to agree the right way forward on international events, where the UK's collective strength is immensely more powerful than the individual voice. I do not understand why any Scot would actively seek to lose a place on the United Nations Security Council or to stop carrying the most votes possible into the European Union's Council of Ministers or to cut the record level of overseas aid to assist in Africa and countries around the world that are less fortunate than us. Yet that is what the nationalists want. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have a little bit of order and courtesy, please?

Tavish Scott: I am encouraged by the progressive voices in the Labour Party who have also made the case for a federal UK. Those are not enough, but there are some still to come.

The other entirely negative argument that the nationalists in Government use is that they are powerless because this Parliament does not have full economic and legislative powers. Let me say in passing that I do not remember that being said when Glasgow won the right to host next year's Commonwealth games. However, take the environment—a word that was barely mentioned in the recent budget speech setting out Scottish spending in the years ahead. This Parliament passed world-beating environmental legislation—a

claim made consistently by ministers—but the carbon-reduction targets under that legislation have been missed by this Government ever since they were set. The environment is secondary to independence, as are our schools, the hospitals that we depend on and the buses to work. This nationalist Government is sadly fixated not on Scotland's needs but on its own.

I confess that I misjudged Mr Salmond's Government. I actually thought that the SNP believed in a decentralised state, with decision making involving local people in their own towns, villages and communities, but six years of nationalist Government have shown how wrong I was. The most striking change to the Government of Scotland under nationalist rule has been centralisation. The levers of power are pulled in Edinburgh, with command and control of the public sector by nationalist ministers. Local government has been removed of financial powers—thank goodness the local councils are now led by David O'Neill, who will stand up to that. The police have been centralised into a national force, with policing now based on Strathclyde Police writ large—I have no doubt that a more enlightened decentralised Scottish Government in the future will have to address that wrong policing policy.

The quango state across Scotland is just not worth having. The nationalist Government should go the whole hog and subsume every quango into the centre. Today, the pretence that VisitScotland and Scottish Enterprise are anything other than wholly owned and directed subsidiaries of the nationalist Government is gone. The quango state—unelected, undemocratic and a tool of Government ministers—is the reality of nationalist Government today. One certainty about next year's referendum is that the Electoral Commission will be powerless to stop the Government machine being used entirely for political purposes.

The Scotland that I want is a decentralised country that relishes and enjoys its economic, social and geographical diversity and in which decisions are taken at local level to benefit local people—consumers, businesses, teachers and nurses. That is why, when islanders meet in Kirkwall tomorrow, we will be working out what we want, not what Edinburgh or London wants. "Our islands, our future" is about recognising that the best people to decide the future of the islands are those who live and work there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be drawing to a close, please.

Tavish Scott: I did not campaign for this Scottish Parliament, nor for a home-rule settlement within the UK, to have one-size-fit-all politics from St Andrew's house. The alternative, which is a positive alternative, is a federal UK with

a stronger, more accountable Scottish Parliament, for a Scotland in which decisions are taken not by know-it-all ministers in Edinburgh but by local communities in a vibrant, exciting reawakening of democracy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Tavish Scott: That is the Scotland that I want to be part of, and that is the Scotland that we will build after this nation votes decisively for a positive future within our United Kingdom.

15:48

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this important debate about the future of our country. A year from now, people in Scotland will have the opportunity to vote for independence—a vote that will allow our citizens to take control of their destiny and build a Scotland that reflects their values and aspirations and their principles of economic and social justice.

Independence is about ensuring that the Scottish Parliament has all the powers that it needs to shape the economic and social future of this country. It is about ensuring that the decisions that affect the people who live and work here are taken in a Parliament that is elected by and directly accountable to the people in Scotland. It is about safeguarding our citizens from Westminster policies that seem intent on punishing the weak and the most vulnerable in our society while spending billions of pounds on a nuclear arsenal that is based on the Clyde.

Independence is about guaranteeing that our young people will have opportunities to build their future here in Scotland by maintaining access to our universities on the principle of the ability to learn and not the ability to pay; and by making available a training or apprenticeship place for all young people between the ages of 16 and 19 who are not already in education, employment or training.

Despite our best efforts in this Parliament, we will not achieve the truly radical transformation in Scotland's economy and society that the people in Scotland are calling on the Parliament to deliver unless we, as a Parliament, are equipped with the powers that we need to do so. That means giving the Parliament powers over taxation and welfare policy, which I argue is essential if we are to address the deep-seated problems that continue to afflict many in our society.

We need powers that allow us to reverse the welfare reforms that have been introduced by Westminster, and powers that allow us to tackle the glaring inequalities in income and health that continue to divide our society and compromise our

shared commitment to social justice. With independence, the Parliament will have those powers, and others, which will allow Scotland's Government—of whatever political persuasion—to change for the better the direction of travel of our economy and society.

As my colleagues have done, I urge people in Scotland to look at what the Government and the Parliament have achieved in the policy areas where it has the powers to govern for our people. People should consider, for instance, the wholly different directions of travel of the NHS north and south of the border and ask which NHS model people in Scotland favour. I have no doubt that an overwhelming majority in Scotland support the Government's commitment to a model of healthcare that is free at the point of care for everyone and that rejects the creeping privatisation that is changing and, I suggest, undermining the face of the NHS and the delivery of healthcare south of the border.

In protecting Scotland's NHS, the Scottish Government has demonstrated what can be achieved when the Parliament has the appropriate powers. For example, the Government has remained true to the founding principles of our national health service by abolishing prescription charges and removing an unfair tax on ill-health—so benefiting people with long-term conditions such as diabetes, asthma and Crohn's disease—by introducing free eye tests for all and by providing free personal and nursing care for our elderly citizens.

The health of our nation is about much more than the delivery of medical care. It is about enacting legislation that prohibits smoking in public places and changes the difficult and unhealthy relationship that Scotland has with alcohol, and it is about introducing policies that mitigate the level of demand on our public services by improving the general level of the health of our citizens—the preventative element of healthcare. Those are positive measures that we in the Parliament have taken and continue to take. Since 1999, successive Scottish Governments have worked to improve the health of our nation and maintain a national health service in Scotland that is fit for purpose. They have demonstrated what can be done when the power to act rests with this Parliament.

If we are to do more, however, and tackle the inequalities in income and opportunity in our country that underlie many of the health problems that we suffer as a society, as well as avoid what I consider will be the negative healthcare consequences that will result from the UK Government's welfare policies, and if we are to create the jobs that we need to grow our economy and raise the quality of life in Scotland—be in no

doubt, that is what the people in Scotland expect and deserve—we must have the powers to do so. Those are powers that we lack at present, and powers that only independence will give to the Parliament.

Scotland has an abundance of resources and talent and can more than afford to be a successful and thriving independent country. That is why I am confident that, a year from now, the Scottish people will choose that all of the decisions that affect Scotland should be taken by the people who care about Scotland the most: the people who live and work here. I support the motion in the First Minister's name.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Cameron Buchanan, to be followed by Christian Allard. Members will be aware that this is Cameron Buchanan's first speech in our Parliament, and I invite members to respect that.

15:54

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): The applause that I received after my swearing in and the silence that came before it were, I think, due to the relief that I had made it, as opposed to my presence.

I believe that it was Ronald Reagan who remarked:

"It has been said that politics is the second oldest profession. I have learned that it bears a striking resemblance to the first."

I have now experienced one of those professions, and I am happy to confirm that it is quite enough for me.

On a serious note, to take on the role of an MSP is pretty daunting, as everyone in the chamber will know. The support that I have received and the kindness shown by members from all sides of the chamber—and, more widely, by the parliamentary staff—have made this challenge so much easier. I express my sincere thanks to everyone.

We would all wish, myself included, that there had not been a vacancy for me to fill, given the terribly sad circumstances in which it came about. There have already been many fine tributes paid to David McLetchie in the chamber and I hope that members will understand if I, too, take a minute to remember him.

I knew David well, and I considered him a good friend. I could always rely on his encyclopaedic knowledge of popular music to whittle away the hours spent on the campaign trail. I am told by my Scottish Conservative colleagues that there were two reasons for going to David's office: either for advice, or because you were in trouble. It was not unheard of to go and see David expecting the former only to find out that, to your horror, you

were very much in store for the latter. I can honestly say that I would dearly have loved to call in and see my friend for either of those things in the past few weeks. I know how highly regarded he was as a parliamentarian, but I remember him simply for being a good friend, in good times and in difficult times. I do not mind admitting how much I miss that friendship. That said, David would expect us to look forward and to get on with the job in hand. I fully intend to do my very best for the Lothian region, which he represented so well for so long.

Members will understand my sheer pride and sense of privilege in representing Edinburgh and the Lothians in the Parliament. We have just finished another tremendously successful Edinburgh international festival and fringe, when our capital is very much in the spotlight. People from across the globe come to enjoy the very best of the performing arts, to soak up the atmosphere of our historic capital and, of course, to marvel at the spectacle of our on-going tram works, which were originally due for completion in February 2011. Is that what the First Minister meant in his speech by a "constitutional journey"?

One aspect that struck me during the festival and various fringes was the level of coverage and attention that they received from the media and members of the public throughout the UK. It is clear that interest and excitement over the annual arts festival is not confined to the Lothian region, nor to Scotland for that matter. It is obviously important for the whole of the United Kingdom. It is that relationship—the link between Edinburgh and the Lothians and the wider United Kingdom—that is so important to our future success and growth.

Scotland is the UK's second-biggest financial hub besides London. It accounts for 24 per cent of total jobs in the insurance sector. Edinburgh boasts the headquarters of Tesco Bank and Virgin Money and the global headquarters of RBS Group. All of that goes to show just how important the Scottish services sector is in the UK. From the perspective of Scotland, £45.5 billion was generated in exports to the rest of the UK. Of that, just under £10 billion came from financial and insurance activities alone.

Scottish products and services are sold in large numbers throughout the United Kingdom: 84 per cent of mortgages provided by Scottish firms are sold to people living elsewhere in the UK; 67 per cent of individual savings accounts are sold to people living elsewhere in the UK; and 70 per cent of the pensions sold by Scottish firms are sold elsewhere in the UK. When we set out those terms, we see just how important the UK is to Scotland and, indeed, Scotland is to the UK. How vital it is for our future success to have continued

access to that market for our services and goods on an equal and competitive footing.

The rest of the UK is not our only market, of course. From my experience of the textile industry, I can vouch for the importance of our trade within the EU and the rest of Europe. Earlier this year, it was reported that Spanish MEPs—a conservative Catalanian and a nationalist Catalanian—were engaged in a bitter war of words over the responses of Spain and France to Scottish independence. That is confirmation that, along with energy, whisky, textiles and our other more established products and services, we now also export our constitutional wrangling to our neighbours in Europe. Who knows what untapped markets we may find for our newest product? The very public disagreement between Ramón Tremosa of the democratic convergence of Catalonia party and Alejo Vidal-Quadras of the Spanish people's party exposes a good deal of unease elsewhere in Europe over the on-going debate about independence.

It is not difficult to see where this unease comes from and why it is there, given the fact that the United Kingdom is not the only country where a constitutional debate is going on. There are many examples that I could give, but commentators have already noted the close attention that Brussels, Madrid and Berlin, among others, are paying to the debate and its outcome. That unease and concern are bound to colour their attitude to the accession of Scotland to the EU, which, in turn, will create uncertainty that will impact on the confidence of Scottish businesses and those companies that are looking to invest here.

Scotland's future success and prosperity will be largely determined by our relationships with those nations that surround us. Therefore, our link to the UK must be first and foremost. With such strong evidence about the benefits that the union brings us, it is surely crucial that we maintain and strengthen that bond rather than break it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: To ensure that every member who has requested to speak can be taken, under rule 8.14.3, I am minded to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate for approximately 10 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 10 minutes.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

16:00

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): I would like to thank Cameron Buchanan for his first speech in the chamber and to welcome him to

the chamber. When I welcomed him to the Parliament a few days ago, I was extremely impressed by the way that the conversation went, because it went in French—perfect French.

I am sure that Cameron Buchanan will be a great addition to the Parliament. We come from the same background—that of exports. I, too, exported a lot to the rest of the UK before I entered Parliament, and I do not recognise the idea that people are worried about the effect that independence might have on exports. It is a bit like the argument that investment into Scotland would be affected, which was proved wrong last year, when record investment came into the country. I think that the same thing will happen with exports—with independence, the level of exports will increase rather than decrease.

Professor Sir Neil MacCormick said:

"The goal of a 'free Scotland' in the favoured sense must be taken as prescribing the freedom and equality of all citizens regardless of creed, class or ethnic origins, and the free participation of them all as equals in the process of self-government. In a word, democracy."

That greatly appeals to me, as someone who was not born here, someone who is privileged and honoured to be a member of this Parliament and someone who has been engaged in political debate for some years. I do not recognise what the leader of Scottish Labour said earlier, when she said that she was "a proud Scot" and that nationalism somehow lay on the SNP benches and not her party's benches.

Neil Findlay: When the member mentioned the leader of Scottish Labour, I thought that he might have referred to the leader of his party, because I understand that he is a supporter of Labour for independence.

Christian Allard: I will come to that later in my speech, if Mr Findlay does not mind.

As someone who comes from a different origin, I think that it is extremely important that we recognise that the independence debate is for the people who live and work here. This is not the first time that I have been involved in such a debate. In 1997, I voted for the Parliament to come into being. I did the same thing in each of the Scottish elections that took place thereafter. It is extremely important that we change the tone of the debate. When we talk about proud Scots and nationalism, we are talking about the people who live in Scotland and who contribute to society here; we are not talking about ethnicity, people's nationality, where they were born or where they come from. Regardless of a person's accent or religion, the fact that they live in Scotland means that they have the right to vote. We need to respect that.

We must project into the future. The vote in the referendum is a vote for our children and

grandchildren and their children. As someone who has three grown-up daughters—they are Scottish daughters, of course; they consider themselves to be Scottish rather than French—I think that the independence debate is extremely important in helping women to understand what kind of future they can have in Scotland. The vote in 2014 and the debate on it can lead to the empowerment of people and, in particular, the empowerment of women. Some on the Labour benches talk about making things better for women in Scotland and we can make a start in that respect in September 2014.

Given the movement for independence that we have seen, I can easily imagine an overwhelming yes vote in 2014. Why? There are groups such as women for independence, which, in the way it has expressed itself, has been fantastic right from the start of the campaign and has shown us the kind of future that women can have in a new and independent Scotland.

Many other groups have been involved in the campaign. For example, I created the French for independence group, which is important and is open to anyone who speaks French. Indeed, I am sure that we would be happy for our new MSP to join us should he change his mind at any time.

When the farming for yes group, which was formed in the Borders, came to the Turriff agricultural show, I was humbled by the number of farmers who came to ask questions and wanted to be part of the debate and see the kind of future that farming could have after a yes vote. The same is true of the fishing sector. On Friday morning, I will be at the Peterhead fish market and will no doubt get the same questions that I got at the Turriff show. All of these sectors, which are important for exports and, indeed, our future, must be able to consider what things will be like in a new Scotland.

Of course, groups supporting independence have also emerged from the different political parties. Some think that a yes vote is only for nationalists—however one defines a nationalist. I have to say that I do not define myself as a nationalist; if I wanted to do that, I would define myself as French. It is more than that. It is about all the people of Scotland, no matter what party they come from or whoever they vote for. Who would have thought that there would be, for example, a Conservatives for independence group? There is even a group for Liberal Democrats—there are still some left. Of course, none of them is in the chamber at the moment.

There are plenty of other such groups. Mr Findlay is totally right that on the left—

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

Christian Allard: There are many people who want independence, and the issue itself is very important.

All I wanted to say this afternoon is that independence is a lot bigger than one party. It is open to everyone who lives in and contributes to this country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Merci.

16:07

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I will say from the outset that I agree with the comment in the First Minister's motion that

"Scotland has an abundance of resources and talent"

and that there are decisions that we can take and gains that we can achieve "for families and communities". The problem, however, is that instead of taking those decisions and constantly pushing ourselves as a Parliament to utilise those resources and that talent, we are holding ourselves back with relentless debates about our constitutional framework.

I find it interesting that when Scots are asked whether they want more powers for the Scottish Parliament and, if so, what powers they would be, the most common answer is powers over health and education. As we already have those powers, we should be building Scotland's future through the decisions that we take today, not in a year's time.

I want to tell the chamber about a boy in one of my children's classes at school—without identifying him of course. One advantage of having six children is that I think that I have a good chance of no one being able to work it out. I want to give as full a picture as possible because his story illuminates a little of the Scotland that I want to see in the future.

It was clear to many who knew this boy from an early age that he was in danger of going off the rails. His parents were very young themselves and had their own difficulties to overcome and, as a child, he was allowed to run wild. He was not nasty at all but one could see that, without help, he was going to end up in serious difficulties.

This same boy is now thriving at high school; he might not be in all the top sets but he is doing pretty well and is enjoying life. Why? Mainly because of his headteacher at primary school. I know that there are other factors at work on his life, but I also know that his head spotted him as a bright, lively boy who simply needed to be steered in the right direction. Instead of constantly punishing him or telling him repeatedly how bad he was, the head told him how good he was at football and other activities; in fact, he probably

exaggerated how good he was. At one stage, the head used the small amount of discretionary budget that was at his disposal to take the whole school year ice-skating, which the boy was quite good at. He created an environment in which the boy could shine. In other words, he helped to build up his confidence, self-belief and resilience.

It is difficult for me to do justice to the whole story, but that is what I want all Scottish schools to be like. When we talk about Scotland's future, I want all Scottish teachers to have the opportunity to be able to do that. They should be able to give our children the education that they need to develop the skills and talents that will allow them to flourish and to stretch the able and support the vulnerable, but, perhaps above all, they should be able to reach out to individual pupils and help our children to become confident and rounded citizens. The worrying truth is that, although that is happening in some schools, it is not happening in all of them. As good as our schools are, they are still not doing enough for too many children.

Members may have seen a very interesting research paper that was published by the David Hume Institute this month. It was commissioned from Professor Lindsay Paterson by the Scottish Government on the subject of philanthropic investment in education, and it provoked what can only be described as an animated response. The paper recognised that Scotland is a very charitable nation, but that we are sceptical, if not entirely resistant, to philanthropic interventions in education. I will not go into it in detail, but it is worth reading.

A number of Professor Paterson's observations struck me, but one did in particular. His report identified

"a sense that Scottish education is felt to be too uniform, a strength but also a constraint on innovation".

In other words, we are strong on equity but weak on diversity. Can we not have both? I certainly believe that there is much that we can do right now to maintain the fairness that is at the heart of our education system while offering a more pluralistic choice to our children.

The schools of ambition programme a few years back was an excellent initiative that gave schools access to limited but direct funding to develop their own identity and ethos. We already have schools that excel at dance, music and sport, but we could do much more to encourage others to specialise in maths, science or modern languages.

Like most parents, I want all my kids to achieve exam results to reflect their abilities, but I want them to have more. I want them to have greater integration with extra-curricular activities, and I want schools to build on the network of support

that is already there from surrounding clubs—golf, football or drama clubs, or whatever is there.

I appreciate that not everyone may share my vision for Scotland's schools of the future, but is it not the point that we can agree or disagree about those matters now? We do not have to wait for a vote next year. Our children's future is in our hands in the Scottish Parliament now, and we need to act now to give them something to aspire to.

The motion talks about tackling inequality, but do young people really have equal choices when it comes to vocational education? We should be raising standards across the board, not forcing everyone down the same academic path. We could be promoting vocational options as genuine equal choices, but the policy and budget decisions that have been made by the Scottish Government in the Scottish Parliament have demoted Scotland's colleges. At the very moment when we face a generation of young people being lost to unemployment or underemployment, we are shutting the door on the training and skills that they need.

We are already shaping Scotland's future through the powers of the Scottish Parliament in a devolved UK. One of our first acts was to transform nursery education. We have rebuilt the school estate and restored teachers' pay, and we can do the same again for childcare, those with additional needs, and vocational education. We do not need permission or more powers to do that.

It feels as though Scotland has been on hold for the past six years. We have lost 4,000 teachers and more than 1,000 college lecturers. We have seen empty promises on class sizes and student debt, and stalling tactics rather than action on childcare and nursery provision.

The Government is not offering a vision for Scotland's future so much as a mirage. Above all, I want Scotland's children to look to the future with hope and optimism about the life that they will lead, the jobs that they will hold, and the difference that they will make. We have the powers for that under devolution.

I support the amendment in the name of my colleague Johann Lamont.

16:14

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Hope and optimism were mentioned. That reminds me of Alistair Darling on "Good Morning Scotland" today, disowning negative no campaigning and then breezing on to advance a bleak future for Scotland in which we would be all but cut off from our trading partners, cut off from our English

relatives—that was news to me, being half English—and cut off from the expertise of the UK Government. He stopped just short of cutting us off from the rest of the world and prophesying a plague of locusts. I think that I will nickname him Chicken Licken, and his unionist pals Turkey Lurkey and Ducky Lucky. For those who are unfamiliar with the tale, the ending is a happy one. Despite dire, unfounded warnings, the sky does not fall in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite you not to stray into unparliamentary language, please.

Christine Grahame: I wish that you were aware of the story, Deputy Presiding Officer. I will tell you it later; it is very wholesome.

Let us take head-on the proposition that we are indeed better together. Is that really the case? First, did we in Scotland get the Governments that we voted for? For 62 of the past 67 years, Scottish MPs, as an entity, have had no practical influence over the composition of the UK Government. The clarion call from Labour over the years has been to vote Labour and keep the Tories out, but that does not stand up to the test of time. Today in Scotland we have 41 Labour MPs, 11 Liberal Democrats MPs, six SNP MPs and one Tory MP, but we have Tory policies that are supported by the Tories' pals, the Liberal Democrats. We have the bedroom tax, cuts to benefits for the most vulnerable, privatisation of the Royal Mail, food banks and, on the plus side, we have Trident! So much for democracy and the protection of Labour.

However, we all know that "It's the economy, stupid", so what is the track record of UK Governments on our economy? I look back over the voting years that I have notched up to the early days, when I voted Labour. The first time that I did so was in the 1960s of Harold "Gannex-coated, pipe-smoking" Wilson. For the period when he was in power, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer—sound familiar? Oh, and there was the wee matter of the devaluation of the pound in 1967 to cope with a domestic economic crisis and the famous phrase that was coined at the time about breaking away from the straitjacket of—wait for it—boom and bust economics.

Callaghan did not do much better in 1978-79 and the winter of discontent. There was 30 per cent inflation and the streets of Scotland and the rest of the UK were littered with uncollected waste while hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in protest and bodies were unburied—all that while the oil revenues flowed in. Then came Brown and Darling, sub-prime lending and banking collapse, with Darling, the no man, telling us of doom and gloom. Well, he certainly knows doom and gloom when he sees it; he took us right there.

What about Labour's partners in the union, the Tories? Surely they cannot be as hopeless with our money. Well, yes, they can, Alex Johnstone. Remember black Wednesday in 1992? The breaking news then was "UK crashes out of the ERM." The Tory Government suspended Britain's membership of the European exchange rate mechanism and Chancellor Norman Lamont spent billions trying to prop up sterling. I think that the phrase for that today is quantitative easing, which to you and me is printing paper money. Today, there is Danny Alexander—I must not forget the Liberal Democrats, though I try to—Chief Secretary to the Treasury, pronouncing that austerity, cuts to you and me, will continue until 2020. Of course, those cuts are borne by the poor, not the rich.

In the meantime, the oil and gas revenues have been producing wealth and revenue for the UK Exchequer for 40 years and they have decades to go. Do we have an oil fund worth trillions—that sounds a lot to me—like that of Norway, a small, independent country that discovered its reserves at the same time as Scotland's were discovered? Of course not. That Norwegian fund has 1.78 per cent of European stocks and is said to be the largest stock owner in Europe. It can be choosy and authorises only ethical investments. The Norwegians have so much money that they have to think of more ways to invest—talk about money in the bank for a rainy day.

Compare that with the dismal report card of UK Governments over decades: oil and gas revenues squandered, the rich getting richer and the poor, poorer, and more of the same. If I was offered a guarantee that I would get the Government that I voted for and the chance to have my nation's wealth under proper stewardship so that it could be used for investment in Scotland's people and a more just society, it would not be a hard choice.

Independence for Scotland is just that guarantee. All the rest—the daily diet of negatives from the no campaign—is a desperate distraction from that simple truth.

16:19

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): As every speech has shown, there are alternatives. So why independence? Because we're worth it. [*Laughter.*] Of course independence will also make Scotland better off, though not perhaps by the 500 quid promised by *The Scotsman*. I think that we could get them down to 450, but that is another story.

We will be more entrepreneurial, we will be bolder and we will be doing just as every other country that has become independent or regained its sovereignty has done. They have been able to

mould their society and their economy in their own image.

Communities change. It may well be that there was an argument at one point for the total community of the United Kingdom having one economy, but not now. There is too much of a difference, particularly between the south-east of England and the rest of us. There are practical arguments—that might make me an instrumentalist nationalist, in the words of Malcolm Chisholm; I hope that it does not hurt more—and we have to concentrate on those practical things.

In a good speech that shows that he knows how many beans make five in education, Kenneth Macintosh pointed out all the things that we could do if only we stick with the United Kingdom, but we have stuck with it for a while and we have not got round to doing them all. That is not because we do not want to; maybe it is because the amount of money that we have to move around is in the thin column at the end of the accountant's sheet of paper. We cannot move mountains if we do not have the fundamental tools to do that. We can move molehills, perhaps, but that is not going to satisfy any of us—I hope.

I believe that our aspirations will rise if we go for independence, because our self-respect, our feeling of pride in ourselves and our boldness will grow bigger—just the same as everybody else's do—and the opinions of people outside Scotland will reflect that. Independence will not make us a world power, but do we want to be a world power? I do not think that anybody wants us to be, but neither does it hold much attraction to stick with Britain and therefore fall into the category used by President Putin's adviser, who described the country formerly known as Great Britain as an unimportant little offshore island that nobody bothers about. His assessment of the United Kingdom fair takes the sting out of the argument that we are better defended. Are we better defended with one submarine when the United States can put the fifth and sixth fleets into the same conflagration in the world? Are we better defended when we send boys and men out to Iraq and Afghanistan with the wrong boots and without proper armoured carriers? I do not think that we should boast too much about what we can do in defence now. The defence chiefs are saying that we cannot put an army into the field, so what is the argument in favour of being defended by Great Britain, as it was called?

Things change, and it no longer holds water to chant that we have the best of both worlds. Just what is so good about this British state? My friend and colleague, the existentialist nationalist Christine Grahame—

Christine Grahame: Can I be an instrumentalist?

Margo MacDonald: No, you cannot. You are an existentialist. [*Laughter.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we stick to the subject?

Margo MacDonald: I apologise, Presiding Officer. She is making me laugh.

I talked about the men without boots and so on, but what about the aircraft carriers without planes? How can we defend when we are spending all our money on aircraft carriers with no planes?

What about the social wage? Is it the best in Europe? Is that something that we should aspire to? Is it the best that we can do with all the millions that are coming from the North Sea just now? No. Our pensions are not the worst in Europe, but they are among the worst, and some of them are shocking in what they produce. I will not go into the details as I do not have time, but everybody here is aware of how shocking the position is for a huge percentage of our old people at the end of their lives, given the pensions and accommodation that we give them.

That brings me to housing. When I was the director of Shelter—a long time ago—we said that we were short of houses in Scotland, so if we were going to sell council houses, they had to be replaced. That might have worked. Councils would have had to replace them with the proceeds that they got from selling them. However, that was forbidden—from London. We wanted to do it in Scotland, but London did not want to do it, and Labour in London backed the Tories in London. That is a fact, and we still live with the results.

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

Margo MacDonald: It is not fashionable to be a nationalist, as far as I am concerned. It has been a while since I worked out that the best way to look after people in Scotland as well as we can do is to do it for ourselves. I will vote in favour of the independence proposition that is before us, although there are lots and lots of things that I still have to argue out. I hope that the Government will make it plain that there will be choices about how we accomplish the same objectives in our independent Scotland. Neil Findlay and I might yet march shoulder to shoulder.

16:25

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I want to get from aircraft carriers without aircraft to the short walk from my house that takes me to the home of a couple of constituents. Their house is old and cold, and for reasons that really do not matter they are unable to work and are on benefits. There are many such people, and they

are in every constituency and region that we represent.

Why are they cold? The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government have tried to address energy poverty. There are three elements to energy poverty that I want to analyse. Members will not be surprised when I conclude that if we leave ourselves in the hands of Westminster we will be cold for a while.

Whether a house is cold or can be decently heated depends on how it is built and its energy efficiency. It also depends on where it is. Members will have noticed that Scotland is generally rather colder than the rest of the United Kingdom and we need slightly different policies up here, just because the numbers are different.

This Parliament can address energy efficiency, but we need a bit of help from Westminster. The green deal will eventually turn up, although it is certainly slow in coming and I fear that it will be ineffective. However, we have no control over price and very little control over income.

Price is entirely reserved to Westminster. If someone happens to be off gas, as much of Scotland is, they must pay over the top. All our tariffs are regressive, with a fixed charge followed by the marginal. Someone who has a prepayment meter is in the worst possible position, because they have the worst possible charging rate.

If family income is higher, the family is better placed to pay for the energy that it wants to use. However, as the First Minister and his ministerial colleagues never tire of telling us, most economic levers are reserved to Westminster. Other family income comes from welfare benefits. I am grateful to the Poverty Alliance, which notes that there has been no assessment of the impact of welfare reform on fuel poverty. The UK Government has said that a review will be carried out in 2015. It is clear that the combined impact of benefit reductions and changes will increase the number of people living on low incomes. However, how that translates to fuel poverty has not even been modelled.

Are we in good hands, if we are in Westminster's hands? At the moment the answer is no. Given that we live in a fuel-rich country—I do not need to quote the numbers—albeit that it is a cold country, we would surely be in a much better place if we looked after the matter ourselves.

I am grateful to Ken Macintosh for his powerful story about letting the child flourish. Can we please let the country flourish, too? If we could control our own taxation and welfare systems, we could look after the folk down the road who live in the cold house. Mr Findlay said that he wants an effective taxation system—I think that he also

meant that he wants an effective welfare system. I want those too, and history tells me that we will have to do it ourselves. It does not work if we leave matters elsewhere.

What if the good folk down the road decide to do something about those conditions and try to get some work done on their house? There may be schemes to pay for it, but let us not worry about that for the moment. Let us consider the folk whom they might get in to do the work for them. Members may not realise that consumer protection is reserved to Westminster. We are responsible for consumer education, but everything to do with consumer protection and the law around it is reserved to Westminster, and despite the best efforts of our trading standards officers, who are members of local authority staff, the system does not work particularly well. The schemes that are designed to protect people and pick out the good tradesmen—TrustMark is one—do not work as well as they should and are not terribly well supported in Scotland. We have an alternative called the Construction Licensing Executive. I happen to be a director of it, but I derive no benefit from that. My point is that there are Scottish solutions to those problems.

Every trading standards officer in the country would say that it would be much better if their area was one for us to worry about in Scotland and if we could deal with the issues ourselves for the benefit of the Scottish people. The Scottish Government's paper "Consumer Protection and Representation in an Independent Scotland: Options" speaks of payday loans, delivery charges and nuisance calling—the kind of things that we want sorted and which we will have to sort ourselves because if we leave it to the UK Government that will not happen.

My parting thought is that the Post Office will be privatised by the time that we get the opportunity to rectify the problems, so that any future Government will have to work out what we can do about delivery charges and postal services in the independent Scotland that I am sure the Scottish people will vote for because it is firmly in our interests to do so.

16:31

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): Public trust in the establishment is at an all-time low. The reputations of politicians, journalists and banks are all in the gutter. If we have a democratic deficit in this country, it is not that we have only 59 MPs; it is that only 50 per cent of the population bother to vote in our elections. The referendum offered a real chance to change that—a unique opportunity to re-engage people in politics—and many people expect the turnout in the referendum to be high. Up to 20 per cent of the population could vote for

the first time in decades, and it could be a real chance to evolve our politics and to change the way that the public perceive their politicians and how politics is conducted in this country. However, so far, the vast majority of the public see the independence debate as a real turn-off—as something that is not for them. The debate is being conducted by politicians and political activists in front of audiences who have largely made up their minds already.

I have taken part in perhaps 15 to 20 different referendum panel debates so far. It is hard to count them because each one is so like the one before it. That experience recycled reinforces the sense of tribalism that is monopolising the debate. I am as guilty as the next person of that tribal type of debate. We are conducting a debate around the independence referendum that is about attacking and rebutting instead of thinking and listening. It is hardly any wonder that a large number of people throughout the country do not want any part of that conversation. The real conversations are taking place around dinner tables, in playgroups, in canteens and on doorsteps. When I am part of those real conversations, I hear a desperate call for the facts—for information to enable people to make up their own minds about how they are going to vote in the referendum—yet the facts are largely absent.

The Government does not want to hear this, but independence is its own proposition, so it is up to the Government to lay out the case, to put forward the facts and to make the argument for independence.

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Kezia Dugdale: I am sorry. I hope that Mr Mason does not mind if I make a bit more progress.

There are two types of facts coming from the Scottish Government, depending on what it is being asked. If it is asked about a popular policy, the answer to the question is, “Don’t worry. That is guaranteed under independence. We will make it so.” If the question is a bit harder, or if there is division over the answer to the question, it is suddenly a matter for the Government post independence. The Government can hardly be surprised that that inconsistency fuels a sense of cynicism in the public debate around the independence referendum.

The same argument applies to the sense that we are going to have a written constitution in an independent Scotland. On the one hand, the SNP says that it will enshrine certain things in that written constitution. On the other hand, it tells us that it is for the people to decide what will be in the constitution. That is a cynical ploy, and it is no wonder that public support for independence is

falling. It is also no wonder that public support for the First Minister is falling, because he has been found out.

An excellent example of the SNP’s inconsistency lies in the issue of payday loans. For the past 18 months or so, I have been running a campaign on payday loans and, time and again, I have said that in order for us to rid our high streets of the problem we need to cap the cost of credit. That is an issue for Westminster. It took the First Minister a year to say, in the *Sunday Post*, that the SNP would cap the cost of credit. At that point, I started to ask hard questions about how we could do that in an independent country. If we have the same currency as England and have the Bank of England as the currency of last resort, how could an independent Scotland cap the cost of credit for payday loan companies? I was told, “Ah, the answer to that lies in the hands of the post-independence Government. It will come up with the hard answers on that.” Meanwhile, I put forward many ideas for things that the Government could do now to address the problems of payday loans in our communities, but was told, time and again, “Oh, that’s a bit difficult,” or “We don’t have the powers for that.” The political will simply is not there on the part of the Government to make change happen now.

I wondered why that should be, and John Swinney gave the game away last week. It is because it suits the Government’s agenda to keep people on the hook of debt, struggling to make ends meet. For too many families around the country, there is far too much month left at the end of the money, and this Government wants to wait until 2014 before it comes up with the answers to help them. Therefore, Presiding Officer, you will forgive me for thinking that the debate is increasingly cynical.

We need to ensure that, when people go to vote, they know what they are voting for. It is up to this Government to put forward the proposition and come up with facts that people can trust. I urge it to do that, because we will all look back and reflect on our politics at the end of the process.

16:37

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I return to the subject of the abundance of our resources and talent, which I will contrast with our inability to make the most of those things, because I think that that is basically what the argument is about.

We have heard about our energy resources in the form of renewables, oil and gas, and about the fact that we have land that is there to be developed but is underdeveloped. We have more

peer-reviewed academic papers than there are in any other country's universities. We have better biodiversity and, indeed, a more determined climate change mitigation strategy than exist anywhere else in these islands or in Europe.

However, I was reminded this morning about the problems that we face. On "Good Morning Scotland", I heard a voter in Sutherland bemoaning the drop in population in that county—they said that it was the only county that was losing people, but the Western Isles and many other places are, too. That reminded me of a letter that was in *The Herald* at the beginning of July, from a young woman in Achiltibuie called Julia Campbell. She said:

"Here in the north-west Highlands, young families are rapidly becoming our most endangered species. This year our school roll drops to 13, the lowest in more than 40 years.

Depopulation is still happening: for those still left here following years of economic migration and two world wars it looks like lack of affordable housing and jobs could finish the job off, leaving the Highlands as a truly wild landscape."

Local communities want to be able to build houses for themselves and to create jobs. They need energy to do that, and one of Julia Campbell's ideas is to take advantage of the opportunity of having a community windfarm.

The Scottish Government has an energy policy that it can be proud of. Audit Scotland said:

"The Scottish Government has a clear, strategic vision for developing renewable energy, which is reflected across other policy areas."

However, it went on to say that

"renewable energy projects are progressing more slowly than anticipated due to factors such as the current economic climate and changes in UK energy policy."

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Rob Gibson: I am sorry; I do not have time.

We are being held back by policies that say that, on the one hand, the islands can get more for producing electricity and, on the other, they will have to pay more to get on to the grid. That is the UK policy that is holding us back on energy.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will Rob Gibson give way?

Rob Gibson: No.

That is the UK policy that is holding back the people of Achiltibuie and those in the tenements of Glasgow or wherever.

Then there is the privatisation of the Royal Mail. We will not be able to get the service so that we can sell goods. We can do that once we have our hands on the broadband that is coming.

We cannot get the land on which to build houses because many of the powers remain in London. The Government there will not end tax haven status and will not get rid of trust law. We will have to do that for ourselves. We have to get the powers to do so.

With all due respect, although I agree with the leader of the Opposition when she says that the land league was something to be proud of, it only protested; it did not get all the land back. We can do that only with the powers that are held at Westminster at the moment.

On energy, the Crown Estate is intent on taking a huge chunk of the profits from projects such as those that will develop offshore in my constituency and many more. Last week in the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, the Crown Estate said:

"For argument's sake, let us use 2020 projected values. If we think about a round 3 site, for 1,000MW of installed capacity, we would expect to receive about £7.6 million per annum."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 11 September 2013; c 2538.]

That is the opportunity that could be held in our hands without it being sent as an impost to the Treasury. We need to control the Crown estate in order to empower coastal communities. There are many more such opportunities, but I will move on.

The Labour Party has a will-they, won't-they position on the bedroom tax. Will it keep it or scrap it? We wait to hear with interest. We were talking about old songs earlier on and there is an old song that we should talk about here. It is Hamish Henderson's internationalist anthem "The Freedom Come All Ye". He said in the last verse:

"In your hoose a' the bairns o Adam
Can find breid, barley-bree and painted room."

In Scotland, we aspire to have the potential to give people their right to a roof over their heads and the food and recreation that they deserve as people in our country. They have been denied those things far too often in the past, whether they are in Achiltibuie, Glasgow or wherever.

That is why I recognise and welcome

"evidence that shows that there are gains for families and communities when decisions about Scotland are taken by those who care most about Scotland, the people who live and work here."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be drawing to a close.

Rob Gibson: The challenge of the debate is simple. As Hamish Henderson said,

"So come all ye at hame wi Freedom,
Never heed whit the hoodies croak for doom".

I support the motion.

16:43

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): The First Minister began the debate by saying that he hoped that it would be based on respect. Members duly listened to him with respect, but for much of the debate after that it was business as usual. It was an enormous regret that, when Johann Lamont and Ruth Davidson spoke, they were both barracked throughout. There was a point in the debate when the tone changed and, latterly, some thoughtful speeches were made on all sides and were listened to with more courtesy.

The First Minister made one observation in his speech with which I agree but about which we should be careful. He said that the decision must be taken by Scots living and working in Scotland. I agree with that but, because we are members of the United Kingdom, there are many Scots who have chosen to work—sometimes only temporarily—elsewhere in the United Kingdom who have every intention of returning home to Scotland. They may not have a vote next year but they still have a voice. What they have to say is relevant and should not be ruled out as being irrelevant simply because, at the moment, they do not happen to reside in Scotland.

We should be careful about the language that we use. The vote will be by the people of Scotland living in Scotland next year, but the future of Scotland and of Scots is of consideration and concern to Scots wherever they are, whether they are in Scotland or not.

Why are we having a debate in Parliament and not a vote in the country today? We are having a debate because the Government argued that we needed two and a half years to detail the argument for independence and to argue the detail of independence. However, one and a half years would say that they are no wiser, no clearer and no more certain of the detailed case for independence on which they will vote next year.

That is why I hope—Kezia Dugdale made an enormously thoughtful speech that spoke directly to this point—that when the Government publishes the document in November, it will use the opportunity finally to persuade the people of Scotland that there is an argument that can be tested and which it can put with a degree of certainty and clarity. At the moment, people believe that they will be involved in a further 12 months of debate, at the end of which they will know no more about the decision that they must reach than they would have known if the decision had been taken today.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: No.

We might not be voting as a nation today but, all over Scotland, the media and groups are discussing the issue, simply because it is one year to the final decision. This morning, I participated in a debate with the hospitality industry at the national museum of Scotland, which was attended by more than 200 people, including employers, educationists, students and hospitality industry employees. The yes Scotland campaign's presentation was led by Jim Mather, Jean Urquhart and Andrew Fairlie.

Before the debate took place, we took a vote on people's intentions. Five people voted yes, 43 were undecided and 77 voted no. After the debate, 10 people voted yes, 17 were undecided and 102 voted no. As George Adam might put it—well, I will come to him in a moment. As one wag said, despite being beaten 10 to one, the yes Scotland campaign will no doubt argue that, because it doubled its vote, it won the argument.

In Aberdeenshire, the result of a mock referendum of schools—the First Minister's heart territory—was announced this afternoon. Of those pupils who will be able to vote, 2,847 voted yes and 8,718 voted no. As George Adam might say, in the north-east, the no campaign had the yes campaign on toast.

There is an argument for independence, which I thought that we would hear from the yes Scotland campaign and the SNP. That argument is that there are no certainties, that independence is a risk and a gamble and that we do not know for sure what Scotland would be like in a range of areas but we believe in the people of Scotland and that, when faced with the opportunities of independence, we can rise to meet them and be a successful country. However, that argument has not been made.

Earlier in the summer, I was happy to dismiss and condemn some of the silly stories that have been put about. There have been many silly arguments against an independent Scotland; I was happy to say at the time that the story about mobile phone charges was one.

However, the yes Scotland campaign has on significant issues been certain when there is no certainty—on the big issues, not the trivial ones. On our currency, the issue is not whether we can have the pound but on what terms. On Europe, the issue is not that we cannot be in it—I agree that, ultimately, we would be a valued member of the European Union—but when and on what terms. The issue of whether we can be a successor state to NATO—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Mr Carlaw, I ask you to come to a conclusion.

Jackson Carlaw: I thought that I had six minutes, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You are now at 5 minutes and 34 seconds.

Jackson Carlaw: I am sorry, Presiding Officer; you have interrupted me rather sooner than I expected.

The Presiding Officer: I am just reminding you of your time; you have six minutes.

Jackson Carlaw: Well, I am the first to be reminded, Presiding Officer. I really think that it was most unreasonable of you to intervene 30 seconds before—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Carlaw, you have six minutes.

Jackson Carlaw: I had six minutes, but you have occupied 30 seconds of them.

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to resume your seat.

16:49

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I congratulate Cameron Buchanan on his thoughtful contribution—particularly his sincere tribute to our late colleague, Mr McLetchie.

One would be forgiven for having the impression that every single day in a separate Scotland would be an historic day, but I am not sure that history will long remember this debate, because the truth is that we have heard nothing new this afternoon.

We welcome this milestone in the referendum debate not just as a chance to vindicate our party politics but because it represents one year until the Scottish people have their chance to decide on the independence question. The choice facing the people of Scotland is whether to go it alone or continue working together with the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are our partners as well as our neighbours and we have built the United Kingdom together.

On the Labour side, the solidarity and partnership that we have with the rest of the British Labour movement are important to us and we know that our greatest achievements—the welfare state, our national health service and our commitment to international development—are achievements that progressive people in every part of the UK have achieved together.

Devolution—the Scottish Parliament—was achieved not only by pressure within Scotland but because legislation was passed in the UK Parliament that reflected our desire for effective home rule and a continuing partnership across the whole of the country. It is not devolution that is broken; rather it is this Scottish Government,

which is failing to put the people's priorities at the heart of this Parliament's business.

Under the SNP, Scotland is on pause. It is the SNP that seeks to denigrate devolution—to focus not on what this Parliament can do for Scotland but on the grievances of nationalists against the rest of Britain.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Drew Smith: I welcome Mr McDonald's sandwich heckling in these debates. We enjoyed his loudness at the beginning but perhaps he could have contributed to the debate if he has something to say at the end.

Last week, we had a budget for independence that failed to set out a plan for growing jobs and our economy. The week before, we had a legislative programme that showed the SNP's lack of ambition, holding Scotland back because it thinks that undermining Scotland's confidence in devolution is the only way in which it could ever convince enough Scots to take a chance with separation. It is therefore no surprise that we have heard the usual litany of complaints from the SNP this afternoon—other than from Christine Grahame, who must win some kind of positivity prize at the SNP Christmas party this year.

We reject the notion that the union must be broken to bring about the change that we would wish to see in our country, either here in Scotland or in the rest of Britain. The question, as many members across the chamber have said, is not whether Scotland could be an independent country but whether it wants to be.

As Malcolm Chisholm said, we believe in the best of both worlds: a strong Scottish Parliament that is focused on Scotland's priorities and a strong United Kingdom in which we share and pool both our resources and the risks that we face together.

We have said this afternoon that we welcome the people of Scotland—not just Scotland's politicians—having their say on this question next year. It is the people who are demanding information about the SNP's plans for a separate Scotland and it is the people whom the nationalists need to convince.

Margo MacDonald: If the people are demanding information about independence—and I agree that they are—I think that they are also demanding information about the alternative, which is the union.

Drew Smith: I have no disagreement with Ms MacDonald on that point. We need, therefore, to move beyond the point where, every time someone raises a question, they are accused of scaremongering. *[Interruption.]* I apologise, Presiding Officer; I seem to have inadvertently hit

the button that activates the chips on SNP back benchers' shoulders.

So far, the signs that the SNP is rising to the challenge of its own objective are not encouraging. Scottish ministers have been caught out saying one thing about independence in private and something else entirely in public. Deficits are turned into relative surpluses and legal advice on EU membership is asserted to exist on television, only for it to turn out that it was not even commissioned at that point.

The imagination of the SNP in bending what independence means and has always meant to some of the contributors to the debate to mean something else entirely knows no bounds of principle or practicality.

The party that trumpeted its disarmament credentials when its policies were not subject to scrutiny now wishes to shelter under NATO's nuclear umbrella—so long as someone else holds up the umbrella for it. Former republicans now reassure Scots of a royalist persuasion that they want a monarchical union with England.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP) *rose—*

Drew Smith: Welfare arrangements can be shared while at the same time being transformed to reflect undefined Scottish values. Linda Fabiani again completely failed to define what those values might mean.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Drew Smith: The continual reassessment of the limits of independence by its longest-standing supporters reflects a desire not to lead Scots to voting yes, but to wear them down.

Bob Doris *rose—*

The Presiding Officer: Mr Doris, the member is not giving way—sit down.

Drew Smith: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

In the past year, we have witnessed a Scottish Government saying anything that will help its case, no matter whether that reflects its real views or would actually damage Scotland rather than help it.

The Bank of England is to be Scotland's lender of last resort, yet Scotland is to have no say in setting the interest rates of Scots with mortgages to pay. We have had no answers on pension arrangements after independence, and we are expected to support financial regulation being made in London, while at the same time withdrawing our representation from the places where decisions are made. The SNP is presenting not so much a vision for Scotland as a case for itself.

On the Labour side, we have presented our view that, while devolution is essential for Scotland, union and partnership are needed too. We hope and believe that Scotland makes that choice for itself next year. The choice that we face is not Scotland versus England; the debate this afternoon has been between Scots on what the best future is for Scotland.

During the debate, Labour members have questioned the assertion in the motion that only independence can solve inequality. That flies in the face of evidence that I heard when I was a member of the Health and Sport Committee from Kate Pickett, who knows a thing or two about equality in this country. She said that it was the duty of decision makers at every level to make policy that sought to reduce inequality, and she was clear that there is no silver-bullet power or policy that solves those problems. The most progressive decisions are taken by the most progressive people; where they live has nothing whatever to do with it.

Ken Macintosh was correct to point out that the SNP's decimation of the college sector does not help, and when the Scottish Government turns this place into a talking shop to avoid defending the decisions that it has taken itself, that does not help either. A bonus for big business, with tax competition for corporations, will not help Scotland any more than it will help people in the rest of the UK, who will all lose out as a result.

Mark McDonald: Drew Smith's leader said that her mind was changed on devolution when she saw the impact of the Thatcher policies on the children that she taught. Does he not look at what is happening to disabled people in Scotland under the current Tory Government and reflect that we would perhaps be better taking decisions on welfare in this chamber?

Drew Smith: I assume that Mr McDonald was not convinced of the case for independence by the welfare policies of the current Scottish Government. That is the fallacy behind the case that the SNP is presenting. I am pretty sure that Mr McDonald supported independence as the answer to every policy question that Scotland—and the rest of the UK—faces long before the election of the current Conservative Government, and I remind members that the First Minister advised people in Scotland to vote Liberal Democrat.

No one in the debate—not even Neil Findlay—put it any better than the much-quoted Professor Stiglitz, when he said:

“Some of you have been told that lowering tax rates”—

The Presiding Officer: Will you bring your remarks to a close, please?

Drew Smith: Certainly, Presiding Officer—I will leave Professor Stiglitz for another day.

Over the years, independence has been the SNP's answer, whatever the question. Now that it is the people's turn to ask the questions, the SNP's independence answer sounds less and less convincing.

The amendment that Johann Lamont has lodged recognises that it is the people who should be at the heart of the debate, and it is they who will take the decision. We look forward to their positive endorsement of Scotland's place in the union and a strong Scottish Parliament in a strong United Kingdom.

16:58

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): I congratulate Cameron Buchanan on an eloquent maiden speech in the Parliament, and on his very moving words about his predecessor. [*Applause.*]

I also thank everyone who has taken part in the debate; there have been some excellent speeches on both sides.

I do not want to begin on a negative note, but I will get this out of the way at the start. I genuinely cannot decide whether Tavish Scott's speech was the most depressing point in the debate or the most ridiculous. I accept that it must have been a real strain for him to have to explain to the poor passenger at Edinburgh airport why the UK is perfectly happy to be in a passport-free common travel area with independent Ireland but somehow would not want to be in one with an independent Scotland. That must have been a difficult conversation to have, but it is no excuse for Tavish Scott's characterisation of independence or of the independence debate—

Drew Smith: Will the minister give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Let me just finish and then I will give way later.

Tavish Scott said that independence would pitch us into a pitch-black room from which we would never get out. Tavish Scott should try telling that to the 150 countries around the world that have become independent in the past 60 years, not one of which wants to go back the way. The only pitch-black room that Scotland has been cast into is the one marked "Tory Government", which is propped up by the Liberals and is a Government that we did not vote for.

Listening to some of the speeches this afternoon and to other contributions in the wider debate, I have often been reminded of an old

leaflet that I came across recently. This leaflet from a previous no campaign states:

"Vote NO ...

BECAUSE it means *competition* ... instead of *co-operation* ...

BECAUSE it can be of no benefit commensurate with the additional expense involved ...

BECAUSE it is unwise to risk the good we already have for the evil which may occur."

That comes from the vote no campaign against votes for women. The reason why I quote that is that it often strikes me that every progressive campaign in history has been met with the kind of dreary, can't-do, it's-all-too-risky, let's-just-stay-as-we-are arguments that we heard earlier from others, including Ruth Davidson.

Ruth Davidson: From the Deputy First Minister's side of the argument, we have heard about the devolution arguments of 1997, the poll tax, the winter of discontent, a tour of Harold Wilson's Government, black Wednesday and now votes for women. Given that historical analysis, does she recognise the words of Alex Bell, who up until very recently was head of her own policy unit, who has said that the SNP's campaign is relying on "tedious" ideas and "tired policies" and that Alex Salmond's approach is thoroughly "wrong"?

Nicola Sturgeon: Actually, the words of Alex Bell that I preferred—I expect that this will be of more interest to those on the Labour benches—are:

"For many of us the nationalist case represents what the UK Labour party could be, if it had a spine".

That is a phrase that I can agree with.

The reason why I quoted from the leaflet against women's suffrage is that all progressive campaigns have faced these kinds of voices. The fact of the matter is that, just as those who said no to votes for women were wrong and just as those who said no to the establishment of this Parliament were wrong, so too today those who say no to independence are wrong and they will be proved wrong.

Johann Lamont criticised the First Minister for having campaigned for and believed in independence for 40 years. That comment said more about Labour than it did about the First Minister. Obviously, sticking to a principle that one believes in is an alien concept to people in the Labour Party these days.

Johann Lamont: The reality is that the First Minister will argue for independence regardless of what Government is in power, regardless of what the situation is and regardless of the evidence that it will damage the people of Scotland. That is not a journey but simply being obdurate.

Nicola Sturgeon: The First Minister sticks to his principles and argues for what he believes is right for Scotland; Johann Lamont argued against devolution in 1979—she was wrong then, she is wrong now and she will be proved wrong in the years to come.

I want to make three key arguments to support the case for independence today. First, Scotland can afford to be an independent country. We are one of the wealthiest countries in the world. It is a fact that for each and every one of the past 30 years—oil prices high or oil prices low—we have generated more tax per head than the rest of the UK. Malcolm Chisholm, who is a man for whom I have the utmost respect, gave figures suggesting that welfare spending was about £60 higher per head in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. That is correct, but what he did not say is that, in the exact same year, we contributed £1,700 more in tax. Let it not be said by anyone in this Parliament that Scotland cannot afford to be independent. The question is not whether we have the wealth to be independent but whether we will access that wealth to build the better country that we want Scotland to be.

Malcolm Chisholm: Once again, the cabinet secretary quotes figures selectively, and she has not answered my more substantive point, which was that in only six of the past 22 years has Scottish revenue as a percentage of UK revenue been above Scottish expenditure as a percentage of UK expenditure. She is not taking account of Scottish expenditure when she quotes figures on tax.

Nicola Sturgeon: Whatever way we cut the figures, Scotland's public finances are in better shape than the UK's public finances, but the benefit of independence is having the powers to grow our economy faster and create more wealth so that we can challenge some of the issues that we face. You know what? Being one of the wealthiest countries in the world while having some of the highest levels of child poverty cannot be an argument for staying the same. It is an argument for doing things differently and better. It is an argument for being independent. I say to Tavish Scott that I will take a more prosperous and socially just Scotland with a decent welfare state over nuclear weapons and a seat on the UN Security Council any day of the week.

My second argument is that it is better that we take decisions here in Scotland. Johann Lamont accepts that principle but cannot bring herself to take it to its logical conclusion, so she has tied herself in knots. Apparently, that principle means coming out of the EU, although she forgets that it is the UK that wants to take us out of the EU. However, she misses the point that being independent means that we choose when we

share sovereignty and when we do not. Under the current system, Westminster decides what powers this Parliament has and what powers it does not have. No one can explain to me why it can be right—as it is—for us to have the power to protect our NHS from privatisation but to have to stand by while our welfare state is destroyed.

Labour says that that is about pooling resources. The giants of the Labour movement must spin in their graves when they hear that, because the reality of welfare cuts is not the pooling of resources but the pulling of the rug from under the feet of the poor and vulnerable in our society. I say to Malcolm Chisholm that I believe in social solidarity as much and as passionately as he does, but I believe that we display more solidarity with the poor and vulnerable in England if we take the powers to lead by example and abolish the bedroom tax than we do if we say that everybody has to suffer under it.

My third and final argument is that this debate is not about the SNP. People can think, as I do, that the SNP is the greatest thing since sliced bread, or they can think, as Neil Findlay does, that we are the devil incarnate, but that is not the point. Independence is about having the power to decide and choose. It is about where power and decision making lie. It is about whether we always get the Governments that we vote for or whether we have to put up with Governments that we do not vote for—such as Tories propped up by Liberals—as we have had for more than half my life.

This debate will happen once in a lifetime, and I believe that we all have to do it justice. I really believe that, a year from today, people will reject the fears and smears and will opt for hope, optimism and the human instinct to strive to build a better world, starting with building a better country—the better country that we know Scotland can be. I look forward to the debate and to making the argument. I believe, just as the BBC audience in Berwick did last night, that the Scottish population will come to the yes side and vote for independence for our country.

Business Motion

17:08

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-07725, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 September 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: New Learning Disabilities Strategy, The keys to life

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 September 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Portfolio Questions
Culture and External Affairs;
Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist
Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 September 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: One Year
to Go until the Ryder Cup

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 1 October 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 October 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Education and Lifelong Learning

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 3 October 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:09

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-07726, on the establishment of a committee.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament shall establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider matters relating to the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill is passed, falls or is withdrawn.

Number of members: 4.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party.

Membership: Sandra White, Bruce Crawford, Anne McTaggart, John Lamont.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:09

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-07721.1, in the name of Johann Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S4M-07721, in the name of Alex Salmond, on Scotland's future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothian) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 50, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-07721, in the name of Alex Salmond, on Scotland's future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothian) (Ind)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)

Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 49, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Scotland has an abundance of resources and talent and can more than afford to be a successful, thriving independent country;

notes that successive UK administrations have pursued an economic policy that has led to the UK having one of the most unbalanced and unequal economies in the developed world; agrees that it is wrong and costly for policies to be imposed on Scotland that have been overwhelmingly rejected by Scotland's political representatives, and welcomes evidence that shows that there are gains for families and communities when decisions about Scotland are taken by those who care most about Scotland, the people who live and work here.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-07726, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the establishment of a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament shall establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee.

Remit: To consider matters relating to the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill.

Duration: Until the Bill is passed, falls or is withdrawn.

Number of members: 4.

Convenership: The Convener will be a member of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and the Deputy Convener will be a member of the Scottish National Party.

Membership: Sandra White, Bruce Crawford, Anne McTaggart, John Lamont.

Palliative Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-7599, in the name of Nanette Milne, on Marie Curie, signpost to palliative care.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication in the *European Journal of Palliative Care* on 9 September 2013 of the study, *How good is primary care at identifying patients who need palliative care?*; notes that the study was carried out in partnership by Marie Curie Cancer Care, the University of Edinburgh and NHS Lothian; understands that only 20% of patients with a non-cancer diagnosis were identified for palliative care before dying; further understands that patients who were identified for palliative care received it too late to fully benefit; considers that patients and primary care staff find it difficult to discuss death and dying; believes that more needs to be done to offer supportive and palliative care to more people with life-threatening illnesses in North East Scotland and across the country, and supports the Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief initiative as a way of tackling what it sees as the Scottish taboo of talking about death.

17:13

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):

I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity to lead a parliamentary debate on the report "How good is primary care at identifying patients who need palliative care?" just nine days after its publication in the *European Journal of Palliative Care*. I thank all the MSPs who have supported my motion since it was lodged last week. The report is the result of a collaborative study by Marie Curie Cancer Care, the University of Edinburgh and NHS Lothian, led by Professor Scott Murray and Dr Lilin Zheng of the university. I flag up a north-east connection, as Professor Murray began his career in primary care as a trainee in the Elmbank practice in Aberdeen, where my husband was a partner.

The study is the first in the UK to examine the point at which patients are formally identified for palliative care. It obtained its information from the experience of 684 patients across nine Scottish general practices. It found that, whereas 75 per cent of cancer patients were identified for palliative care before dying, only 20 per cent of patients with organ failure as a result of chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disease, or who had dementia, either asked for or were identified for palliative care. Most patients received it too late to gain full benefit from it. On average, care was initiated just eight weeks before death.

The study also found that few patients openly admitted that they might die, as they were put off by the negative connotations and lack of understanding of terms such as "palliative" and

"hospice". It also found that, sadly, general practitioners found it difficult to discuss death and dying with their patients, in particular patients who had a non-cancer diagnosis, even though they recognised that open discussion is helpful for patients, their relatives and the people who take care of them.

The task of identifying patients who would benefit from palliative care was found to be easier for GPs if patients and/or family members asked them for information and extra support, and specific tools such as multidisciplinary meetings and national guidance were found to be of help to them in making decisions to formally identify such patients.

The World Health Organization has stated that all patients with a life-threatening condition can benefit from palliative care, which it recommends be phased in from the point of diagnosis. However, many such patients are not being identified in hospital or in primary care, and the resultant late access to palliative care limits the opportunities to improve the quality of life of patients in their last year of life.

The study concludes with four recommendations. It recommends that patients who are diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses should be encouraged to discuss and plan their future care so that their wishes can be accommodated, and that doctors and nurses should offer supportive and palliative care to more people with such conditions.

The Scottish taboo around talking about death should be tackled, and the report considers that the Scottish Government should lead a public discussion on issues surrounding death and promote more widely its national plan for palliative care, which is called good life, good death, good grief. The report's final recommendation is that all doctors and nurses be trained in how to identify when patients need palliative care support in addition to the normal treatment for their condition, and that such training include the provision of support to health professionals to have conversations about death and dying.

None of this is rocket science, and if the recommendations were taken on board, many more patients and their families would be helped towards a positive end-of-life experience through the prevention and relief of suffering and the early identification, assessment and treatment of pain and the associated physical, psychosocial and spiritual problems, and by being enabled to choose where they want to be cared for and where they wish to die.

I ask the minister to say, when he responds to the debate, what plans there are, in conjunction with the Royal College of General Practitioners, to

review the training of GPs and primary care staff to help them to have better communication with their terminally ill patients, and to ensure that more non-cancer patients access palliative care in the last year of their lives. I also ask the Government, particularly at a time when we will soon be hearing the arguments for and against Margo MacDonald's proposals for patient autonomy in deciding when to end life, how and when it will initiate a public debate on death and dying in an attempt to overcome the taboo that currently surrounds the issue in Scotland.

I thank Richard Meade of Marie Curie Cancer Care for his help in preparing for the debate and I pay tribute to Marie Curie Cancer Care for the huge amount of work that it does in Scotland and across the United Kingdom for patients with terminal illness. We have all heard of Marie Curie nurses, but the breadth and extent of the charity's work is less well known. Its 740 employees in Scotland, its 300-plus volunteers and the 3,000-plus people who collected for this year's great daffodil appeal mean that nearly 4,500 patients in 31 out of 32 Scottish local authority areas are supported by nearly 400 Marie Curie nurses, who give them excellent end-of-life care and the choice to die at home, if that is what they wish. Research shows that although the vast majority of people wish to die at home or in a hospice, nearly 60 per cent of deaths in Scotland occur in a hospital. I firmly believe that, without the support of Marie Curie nurses, that proportion would be significantly higher.

Well over 900 patients have been cared for in the Marie Curie hospices in Edinburgh and Glasgow in the past year, and nearly 5,000 have been supported in the community in those two cities alone. Marie Curie also provides emotional support and companionship for many patients with terminal illness, and through its bereavement support services supports their families and carers after the patient has died.

Moreover, as well as doing its own research, the charity funds one of the UK's largest palliative care research programmes. Much of that research, including the study that we are discussing, is collaborative and aimed at finding practical ways of improving the care of patients who—from whatever cause—are terminally ill, and of their families.

Although I could say much more about Marie Curie Cancer Care, I will leave it to others to fill in the gaps that I have left. I look forward to the debate and congratulate all those who have contributed to this very important study on access to palliative care on publishing such a comprehensive report. I commend it to the minister and to Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Malcolm Chisholm, I remind members in the chamber to switch off mobile phones and other devices, unless those devices are being used to deliver a speech, in which case they should be switched to silent.

17:20

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Nanette Milne on bringing this important issue to the chamber, and I congratulate Marie Curie Cancer Care on its involvement in this work and, indeed, on its superb contribution to palliative care.

As the report with which the charity is associated confirms, there is a huge disparity between the 75 per cent of cancer patients and the 20 per cent from the non-cancer group being identified for palliative care; furthermore, the support that is given to the non-cancer patients is often too little, too late. Those include patients diagnosed with heart, lung, liver or kidney organ failure or with dementia.

The research team, which investigated the cases of 684 patients from nine general practices, concluded that a gradual and long-term approach to phasing in supportive and palliative care while continuing with other treatment care planning would benefit patients and their families.

I want to make three general points about palliative care not necessarily for members in the chamber but for people outside. First, palliative care, as defined by the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care,

"is a proactive approach involving a multi-professional team. As well as controlling pain and other distressing symptoms, it applies a holistic approach to meeting the physical, practical, functional, social, emotional and spiritual needs of patients and carers facing progressive illness and bereavement."

Secondly, such care is not location-specific and can take place in the community as well as in the hospices that are well known to everyone. Thirdly, general practitioners keep a palliative care register, from which the 20 per cent figure has been derived.

As the motion points out, it is fundamental that we break the stigma of talking about death. The good life, good death, good grief campaign highlighted in the motion not only supports those going through the death and grieving process but seeks to normalise that process and open up conversations on the surrounding issues. Like the report, the campaign points out that it is never too early to think about planning ahead for illness and death and that making plans when we are healthy means that the pressure of making crucial

decisions is lessened at the point when sickness takes hold.

Professor Scott Murray from the University of Edinburgh, who was involved in the research, points out:

“if we are going to better improve the chances for everyone with both cancer and non-cancer diagnoses to benefit from palliative care, doctors and nurses should be comfortable and able to talk to and listen to patients when they want to talk about death and dying.

The big challenge for patients is to talk about how you feel, and what you would like if you become ill, so that your relatives and friends and doctors know what to do.”

Only by doing that will we be able to ensure that maximum numbers of people receive the emotional, spiritual and practical support through services that all patients deserve.

That is beginning to happen in the Lothians, where a complete redesign of the NHS palliative care programme is being directed by Marie Curie in partnership with NHS Lothian. In fact, NHS Lothian, along with the University of Edinburgh, should be congratulated on its association with the research. Using a whole-systems approach to delivery, they hope to reduce the number of avoidable emergency admissions and give patients the choice of place of death and, by doing so, work to improve the community-based model of end-of-life care and make the process less intimidating for those involved.

Based on the delivering choice model that was found to be successful in Somerset, the redesign will involve three key stages of design and implementation and it is hoped that, through an effective assessment of local need, services can be developed to operate more effectively while ensuring that local clinical staff are engaged with process and have ownership of the models.

Finally, continued support is necessary in the implementation of the redesign structures throughout the area. As this consultative approach between the NHS and Marie Curie to providing a more accessible and coherent framework for care delivery has been seen to work elsewhere, I am glad that it is being implemented in this area.

Once again, I congratulate Nanette Milne on bringing this motion to Parliament, and I wholeheartedly support it.

17:24

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I thank Nanette Milne for bringing this debate to the Parliament and Marie Curie Cancer Care for the report that has been provided entitled “How good is primary care at identifying patients who need palliative care?” I welcome that report and what it brings to the debate, because palliative care offers support

to patients and their families at a time when they really need it. That can be an extremely difficult time for members of families as well.

In Renfrewshire, we are served by two hospices—the Accord hospice in Paisley and St Vincent’s hospice in Johnstone—both of which offer care and support for families at times of death. The support that they offer is fantastic. As a politician, I talk about palliative care, the Accord hospice and the work that it does, and I regularly congratulate it, but when people go through that hospice, they see it for what it really is.

When my mum was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year—she died in August—the Accord hospice was absolutely incredible. She got the opportunity to be there and was lucky to be there. When the hospice discussed palliative care with her at the early stages of her diagnosis, she panicked. She had a taboo as the individual who was dealing with it, and she would not have the conversation with us. I spent hours talking to her, as other family members have done with their families. I said, “No. This is about getting you home and making sure you can have palliative care in the home.” That was the original plan, but things moved on and things got worse.

I agree with the report’s four recommendations. I would have agreed with it beforehand, but things are reinforced when you go through such an experience yourself. Patients with life-threatening illnesses should take every opportunity to raise and plan their future care according to their own wishes, but we have to get over the taboo. We must get the idea over to people that family members and individuals should be able to talk to one other about that. The matter is difficult for all of us to deal with, and the taboo is still there.

I know that the Government has the good life, good death, good grief initiative. We need to ensure that more people know about that initiative so that, when other families are in that type of position, they do not have to go through the same difficulties. We have to ensure that all such families get the opportunity to say that there is something more, because someone could give up at that stage and think that palliative care means that they are heading straight for a hospice. It is clear that that is not the case in many situations.

On a personal note again, I want to take the opportunity to say how the Accord hospice in Paisley was fantastic with my mother. The palliative care is simply incredible. When families are moved there, there can be quite a shock. People go full circle with their family: they go from their mother feeding and looking after them to their doing the same for her. Families are asked whether they want to do that, and it can be awkward. They do not want to say no, but they

feel awkward because they want to look after their mother or father in their last days.

I thank Nanette Milne for bringing this debate to the Parliament and for giving me an opportunity to talk about the issue.

17:28

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill)

(Lab): I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate, which allows us to speak positively about the role of palliative care in Scotland. I also commend Marie Curie Cancer Care, the University of Edinburgh and NHS Lothian for producing their study, which was published recently.

I want to focus on the section in Nanette Milne's motion that highlights the reality that we in Scotland have a real collective difficulty in talking about death. Death, dying and bereavement affect all of us, but talking about and planning for the experiences and practicalities associated with them can be difficult. We simply do not open up as a country when it comes to talking about dying and bereavement, and that is not good for us as individuals or as a society. Indeed, studies have shown that unnecessary harm is caused because people in Scotland are not open about the subject.

As the study that we are discussing found, GPs can find it difficult to discuss death and dying with patients. Few patients openly discuss the possibility that they might die from their condition, although doctors think that that can be helpful. A lack of understanding around terms such as "palliative" and "hospice" can be barriers for starting palliative care and support.

It does not have to be that way. At a meeting of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on palliative care a few years ago, we had a presentation from palliative care specialists who had recently returned from west Africa, where they had witnessed an entirely different cultural attitude towards death and dying. Professor Scott Murray, one of the authors of the report on palliative care, was one of those specialists. They told us that they had gone out to learn about the delivery of palliative medicines but that they were struck most not by the difficulties that face medical practitioners in the developing world in delivering adequate palliation in challenging circumstances of high mortality rates and severe poverty, but by the way in which death and bereavement is celebrated in those cultures.

Another CPG meeting was on the history of death and dying in Scotland, and I was amazed to learn just how much of an impact the reformation had in creating the closed culture around death that still pervades Scottish society today. As a member of the Irish Catholic community in Scotland, I am familiar with wakes, so I found it

fascinating to learn of the strictures placed by the Church of Scotland on burials and associated rituals. I am pleased that those restrictions have loosened over time, but there is still some way to go before Scotland becomes more comfortable with burials in the future than it was allowed to be in the past.

I particularly welcomed the creation of the good life, good death, good grief initiative, which seeks to engage support for and enhance the assets of organisations and individuals who have the potential to improve the experience of death, dying and bereavement in Scotland. The initiative is an alliance of more than 700 organisations and individuals who believe that Scotland should be a place in which people can be open about death, dying and bereavement. I believe that Scottish society would benefit from being more open to death, the dead and dying, and that we would become more aware of the options and choices that are available when we are faced with the end of life.

Health and social care professionals and volunteers in all care settings would undoubtedly feel better about being able to discuss with patients and their families and friends a wider range of issues relating to death and bereavement. If people were better placed to talk about death and deal with related issues in a constructive way, there would be more effective support for those dealing with death and bereavement.

Death is an inevitable part of life, but we would face it better if we could make palliative care more available, accessible and appropriate to meet the various needs of each individual person requiring additional care to live well until it is time for them to go and leave the rest of us behind to celebrate their lives.

17:32

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I, too, congratulate Nanette Milne on securing this evening's very important debate, which gives us the opportunity to discuss an important publication and the wider issue of the provision of palliative care in Scotland.

The publication in 2008 of the Scottish Government's first action plan on palliative care—"Living and Dying Well: A national action plan for palliative and end of life care in Scotland"—was a welcome step. There had clearly been issues in identifying those whose medical condition made them appropriate recipients of palliative care and in ensuring that those people did, indeed, receive it. The report acknowledges that by stating:

"To date, however, the provision of specialist services for palliative and end of life care in Scotland ... is known to be

directed mainly to people with cancer, with a greater range of services available to cancer patients and their families.”

That was true in 2008 but, unfortunately, it is still true.

NHS Lothian, the University of Edinburgh and Marie Curie Cancer Care deserve great credit for the work that they did on the publication that we are debating tonight. Its findings are stark and in some cases shocking, and provide a clarion call for action. The fact that only one in five patients dying from non-cancer diseases receives palliative care shames us all, particularly when that was identified as a problem in the national strategy five years ago.

The Scottish Government has made progress. Palliative care guidelines have been developed and we are now the first country in Europe to have implemented a national electronic system for communicating anticipatory care planning for palliative care patients; in addition, the do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation policy has been developed. However, there is still much to do.

One of the more enlightening areas of the research was the views of the health professionals. It is clear that GPs across Scotland are having real difficulty in identifying which non-cancer patients are appropriate for palliative care. They are also having difficulty in discussing death and dying with non-cancer patients with life-threatening conditions.

This is an incredibly delicate and sensitive topic and no one envies the task that our GPs face, but it seems to me that this is something that could be tackled, perhaps with some targeted training in palliative care for GPs. A critical feature of the GP's role is to speak to patients about their end-of-life care. If they are having difficulty in doing that, the Scottish Government has to investigate. Perhaps a working group of general practitioners could engage with those behind the good life, good death, good grief initiative to establish how we can better enable GPs to have these extremely difficult but necessary conversations and tackle the taboo, as it were.

Some 60 per cent of patients die in hospital, but the vast majority understandably wish to die at home or in a hospice, as Nanette Milne said. I therefore believe that we still have a long way to go. We need to use the integration of health and social care as a golden opportunity to increase people's opportunity to pass away in the familiar surroundings of home.

It is in everyone's interests to ensure that those who are in their most vulnerable hour receive the finest care and care that is appropriate to their needs. Not only does that alleviate the patient's suffering, it represents significant savings for the

NHS by supporting the patient's end-of-life care earlier and in a place of their choosing.

17:36

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): As many members have mentioned, Scots are not very good at dealing with these types of things. Death is a time that brings out the best and worst in people. Often, we do not like dealing with all the practicalities surrounding death, expressing our emotions and taking time to look at the practical steps that we need to take. We do our best to avoid those things until we have to do them. We do not tell the people who are closest to us simple things such as how much we love them until it is too late. Often, we do not address key divisions in our families and things that have burned away, sometimes for generations, until time is at its shortest. It can be a healing time and a healing process, but it can also cause many further divisions that leave the people who are left behind with lifelong regrets.

As the report suggests, patients are often offered palliative care very late, and the experience of going through the planning for death often puts pressure on families, who have to help the sufferer, and the people in hospitals who deal with people in their final days. I agree with Nanette Milne that we need a national debate and discussion about these important issues if we are to become more comfortable talking about them and related issues such as spiritual, medical and financial issues, and relationships. If we can take the debate to a more mature level, it will help not just patients and their extended families and friends but everyone who is affected by people being in that position.

When my father was in the Marie Curie hospice in Edinburgh, the help and support for my family was fantastic, but it came very late in the day. That was not the hospice's fault but probably ours, because we did what other people do and avoided the issue until death was almost imminent. People need to talk about death and dying and share their feelings, fears and medical needs.

People also have a lack of understanding of what palliative care is. I certainly did until it came to my doorstep. My wife works in the NHS as a clinical support worker and she often provides palliative care to cancer sufferers. She tells me heart-warming stories of people's humility and humanity, the reconciliation of families and people finding peace with themselves through that period, and all of that is greatly assisted by the carers who help people through that time. I will give a simple example. My wife used to be a hairdresser, and if someone who is receiving palliative care wants their hair cut, she will do it. A simple act such as that makes them feel so much better. Such issues

might be minor to us, but they are major to the person who receives support.

We all want to die with dignity, and I hope that the report takes us down the road towards a mature debate about such matters.

On a lighter note—there ain't many light notes on this issue—I was cycling by the canal in West Lothian last year when I met a guy who was walking his dog. I asked him where he was going that evening, and he said that he was going to a dying party. I said, "What do you mean, a dying party?" His friend had only a few weeks to live and had paid for a party in the pub for all his pals, so that they could have a great send-off for him. That was someone who was at peace with himself and was—I hope—moving on to a better place. There is a lesson in that for many of us.

17:40

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing time for the debate and I take the opportunity to thank Marie Curie Cancer Care, the University of Edinburgh and NHS Lothian for producing the report that we have been considering. I am sure that all members who have read the report realise that it is not criticising what is there, but recognising what is there and considering how and where it can be further improved.

It is in all our interests to ensure that palliative care is provided safely and effectively, at the appropriate time and in a person-centred way, to improve the situation not just for the cared-for person but for the family at that vital time that is the end of someone's life.

In the past there was a tendency to regard palliative care as the province of the hospice and acute sectors, but it is important that we acknowledge that, nowadays, a great deal of palliative care is provided in the community and led by primary care teams. There are challenges for the primary care team in addressing issues with patients and families in the community setting, and it is important that we consider what action we can take to improve work in the area. The report illustrates the need for progress to be made.

The report acknowledges the important work that has been taken forward. Our national action plan, "Living and Dying Well: a national action plan for palliative and end of life care", is addressing a number of key issues that are highlighted in the report. Indeed, the report identifies areas that have been taken forward as part of the plan, such as the work on national guidance and payment structures, which has improved the situation. However, there is a need for further action.

The Government seeks to take forward policy in a collaborative way, working in partnership with the wider sector to ensure that we take forward the national action plan appropriately and have the right priorities. The living and dying well national advisory group's work is crucial in assisting us in that regard and supporting the work that is needed in NHS Scotland and beyond.

It is extremely important that we do some work to ensure that there is an equitable approach throughout the country. That does not mean that care must be the same in every part of the country, but a patient in the primary care setting in Grampian should expect to receive the same type of palliative care support that a patient receives in Falkirk or in Glasgow. There is work for us to do to ensure that care is more consistent, and the national action plan tries to take the matter forward.

The report makes an interesting point about patients who do not have a cancer diagnosis and who have difficulty accessing palliative care. That might be to do with professionals not recognising the issue and discussing palliative care with the patient, because of the nature of their condition, or it might be to do with other factors. No matter what it is, it demonstrates the need for us to look at palliative care on a much more holistic basis. The national action plan is very clear in focusing on the person, not the condition. We must ensure that palliative care is provided in that holistic way, as Malcolm Chisholm said, from the physical to the practical, the functional, the social, the spiritual and the emotional. It is important that it is looked at in that holistic context.

A key part of addressing these issues is appropriate planning. Anticipatory care planning is an important element of ensuring that our primary care colleagues are able to manage the issues more effectively. Jim Hume referred to the fact that we have done a lot of work to improve anticipatory care planning within the general practitioner setting. We are starting to reap some reward from that and it is helping to facilitate some improvements, but we need to build further progress on that. We must look at how we can get much more effective integration between GPs and the wider primary care team, including groups such as pharmacists, who must be seen as part of that team in helping to manage someone's palliative care provision.

A number of members have referred to public attitudes to death and dying. Members will recognise that none of the issues will be addressed quickly or easily. Individuals often have a natural aversion to talking about dying and death. Some good work has been undertaken, which members are aware of, through the good life, good death, good grief programme. We need

to build further on that to allow those discussions to take place.

One of the challenges is the fact that, although professionals can be provided with the tools and the skills to enable them to have those discussions, some professionals still find that difficult. I recognise that there is a personal element to it. No matter how much we arm our staff with the skills and knowledge—a range of resources on palliative care can be provided through NHS Education for Scotland and others—there is a personal element to the work with families, including among the staff who work with the patients, that must be recognised.

We must ensure that we have a healthy dialogue in this country around the issues to do with palliative care, including the positive nature of palliative care, and we must discuss death and dying more openly. No single campaign will address that issue, and all MSPs, in their leadership role within their communities, can contribute to that. If we can achieve a more open discussion of the issues, that will help with anticipatory care planning to ensure that patients who may not have a cancer diagnosis but require palliative care get that care at an earlier stage. It should be recognised that cancer is a life-limiting condition and that we need to engage sooner rather than later.

I thank those who contributed to the report. We will consider its recommendations in detail. The national advisory group is already working on some of the recommendations, and we will continue to look at how we can further improve the provision of palliative care in Scotland as a whole.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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