



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 7 May 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 7 May 2014

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

Portfolio Question Time

Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

Perth (Promotion)

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

To ask the Scottish Government what it and its agencies are doing to promote Perth as one of Scotland's cities. (S4O-03176)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Perth is a modern, dynamic, international city and is able to contribute nationally and locally to driving Scotland's economy. As members are aware, Perth regained city status in 2012 and, as a result of that, now plays a full part in the Scottish cities alliance.

Liz Smith: What assessment has the Scottish Government made of Transform Scotland's calls to create a new intercity rail hub at Perth station, as a catalyst for transport connectivity, urban regeneration and economic regeneration for Perth?

Nicola Sturgeon: Liz Smith will be aware that we are always happy to engage with proposals of any nature, and I am sure that the Minister for Transport and Veterans, who is sitting next to me, would always be willing to engage and will engage directly on the specific point that she raises.

The proposal that Liz Smith just outlined would cost—as I am sure that she is aware—in the region of £1 billion and it would require cutting across the M9 motorway, so there are significant challenges to it, but we are always willing to engage and we will continue to do that. I and, I am sure, the transport minister would be happy to discuss those challenges in more detail with her.

CalMac (Meetings)

2. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of CalMac and what issues were discussed. (S4O-03177)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): Transport Scotland officials meet regularly with CalMac representatives to discuss a range of matters relating to ferry services in Scotland. I last met CalMac representatives a

fortnight ago to discuss a number of matters of mutual interest.

Mary Scanlon: Is the Government aware of the widespread concerns of the public and the business sector in the Western Isles that, due to reduced timetable options and the removal of a dedicated freight ferry, the current major public investment in the Stornoway to Ullapool service will actually lead to a reduced service, particularly during peak periods?

Given the significant contribution that our island communities make to our nation's social, cultural and economic wellbeing, does the Government not recognise and accept the need for the investment to be augmented by the retention of a dedicated freight vessel to provide the much-needed increase in capacity and timetable choices for the service's users?

Keith Brown: I would choose to characterise the £43 million investment that we are making in a new vessel differently from Mary Scanlon. I reassure her that the new vessel, MV Loch Seaforth, will have more than adequate freight capacity when it enters service.

We have said that we will keep another vessel on standby in the intervening period. We are confident that the £43 million investment in the new vessel and the new contribution to Stornoway's and Ullapool's harbour infrastructure will provide an improvement. Many people have staunchly supported that huge £43 million-worth of investment in the new vessel, to replace the two older vessels. There have been questions about the freight vessel's reliability. We are confident that the capacity will be there.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Arran islanders are delighted that the Scottish Government is investing £2 million a year to roll out road equivalent tariff to Arran from October, and they have warmly welcomed the minister's announcement.

Does the minister share my disappointment that CalMac seeks to dilute that commitment by avoiding implementing RET on weekend summer sailings?

Keith Brown: The short answer is no; I do not share that disappointment, because I am aware that there is not an attempt to dilute the commitment to RET. Instead, as has been made clear right the way through the process, there are issues of demand management, which will be necessary. I know that Kenneth Gibson is aware of that.

The operator, in line with what we said in the ferries plan, is in discussions with the community about the need for the introduction of some form of demand management in the summer 2015

timetable, which is partly due to the success of introducing RET in the first place.

We are very clear that demand management will be introduced only where the projected demand on a particular route, as a result of the introduction of RET, indicates that that is necessary. Crucially, from Kenneth Gibson's point of view, demand management techniques will be introduced only if they are agreed by the community.

Aberdeen City Region (Support for Public Sector Recruitment)

3. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how its cities strategy will support public bodies in the Aberdeen city region that find it hard to recruit and retain staff because of the high cost of living relative to the rest of the country. (S4O-03178)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish cities alliance brings together all our seven cities in collaborative partnership with the Scottish Government to focus on creating jobs, developing infrastructure and boosting economic activity across our cities and their regions.

That approach is supported by other key Scottish Government policies such as our commitments on affordable housing and housing supply, our social wage commitments and a public sector pay policy that focuses resources on the lower paid.

Lewis Macdonald: I welcome those priorities. The cabinet secretary will recognise that a generation ago, the unique needs of the oil-producing region around Aberdeen attracted unique solutions—particularly with regard to affordable housing for incoming workers. Given the challenge that is there again today, will she take a lead in Government in seeking to join up the initiatives that have been taken by different public sector employers in the city region, whether that be by recruitment and retention pay supplements, by additional support for housing or by other means?

Nicola Sturgeon: Lewis Macdonald makes a fair suggestion. I am more than happy—either through the cities alliance or in whatever other way might be appropriate—to consider how we can ensure that the work that he acknowledges is being done across the public sector is properly co-ordinated so that we provide solutions that are fit for purpose, given the circumstances that he outlines in Aberdeen.

As Lewis Macdonald will be aware, how we allocate resources for affordable housing takes account of need in different areas. The member referred to the flexibilities within our pay policy and

to the recruitment and retention premiums that can be paid by national health service employers when a case can be made. He is right to acknowledge the work that is being done, but in the interests of trying to build consensus I am more than happy to give him an undertaking that I will consider what can be done to ensure that there is a fully joined-up approach to the issue. I am happy to liaise with him further once I have had the opportunity to give the issue that consideration.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): As others have alluded to, the high cost of living is often due to a lack of affordable housing. How important does the cabinet secretary think it is for Aberdeen City Council, public bodies and the private sector to release land and work together to increase the amount of affordable housing in the north-east?

Nicola Sturgeon: Maureen Watt is absolutely correct to raise that important issue. She has raised the issue of the cost of living in Aberdeen previously with ministers and has had discussions about it with John Swinney.

Land availability is obviously an important element of strategic local programme deliverability and we would expect to see an adequate supply of land. In Aberdeen, that combines land that is owned by registered social landlords and significant other sites that are zoned for housing in the current development plan, which have a planning obligation for affordable housing.

Maureen Watt's point is an important one and I am happy to factor it into the consideration that I have just undertaken to give to the issue in response to Lewis Macdonald.

Flooding (Impacts on Infrastructure)

4. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities has had with the Minister for Environment and Climate Change regarding the long-term impact of flooding on the infrastructure. (S4O-03179)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): I am in regular dialogue with my ministerial colleagues on a wide range of issues of mutual interest.

Nigel Don: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response to a convoluted question that rather makes the point that flooding is no respecter of persons or portfolios. My rural constituents of course see flooding as affecting their homes, the farmlands, the roads and the drains. Can the cabinet secretary assure me that the Scottish Government will have a good look at how these things are funded across the country—in

particular, of course, in my constituency—to make sure that the funds are available to deal with all those problems?

Nicola Sturgeon: As Nigel Don will appreciate, those issues are matters of enormous priority to the Government generally and to Paul Wheelhouse in particular.

The national flood risk assessment takes into account the impact of flooding on property infrastructure and agricultural land. It forms the basis of our current work to produce our first-ever flood risk strategies, which are intended to help inform decisions around the prioritisation of flood risk actions as well as supporting decisions that are made by local authorities and community groups.

That work has fed into the cross-Government work to deliver our first statutory climate change adaptation programme, which responds to a wide range of potential climate change impacts, including flooding. Through that work, individual parts of the Scottish Government are working to ensure that their own policy areas are recognising and adapting to those pressures. I hope that that gives Nigel Don assurance that this is something that very much feeds into every part of the Scottish Government's work.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I agree with the sentiment of Nigel Don's question. Can the cabinet secretary clarify the balance of funding that will be available between large-scale investments of the kind that Nigel Don has described and smaller-scale needs in his constituency and my own in relation to both flooding and coastal protection?

Nicola Sturgeon: If it is acceptable to Tavish Scott, I would be happy to write to him with more detail on that, because the general question will be impacted by the specific demands for funding that he has in mind. I will consult colleagues—in particular, Paul Wheelhouse—and come back to Tavish Scott as quickly as possible with the detail that he is looking for.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): What discussions has the cabinet secretary had with colleagues to ensure that the appropriate cleaning of gullies, burns and culverts is taking place to prevent flooding on roads such as the A85 near Lochawe village, which constantly floods in heavy rains?

Nicola Sturgeon: I assure Jamie McGrigor that those discussions take place on an on-going basis. The transport minister has had some specific discussions about the issues affecting roads that Mr McGrigor has raised. All the specific risk factors for flooding are central to the overall work that we do on flooding, and I would be more than happy—either personally or through the

appropriate minister—to provide further details to any members with particular local issues.

Prestwick Airport

5. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its plans are for Prestwick airport. (S4O-03180)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Our overall aim, as I have advised Parliament previously, is to return the airport to profitability as soon as possible. We will shortly receive a report from our senior advisor, who was appointed—as members will recall—for a period of three months, to inform us about the longer-term options for future business development and management of Prestwick airport. Once that report has been received, I hope to be in a position to provide a full update to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee next month.

Annabel Goldie: The three-month period technically expired yesterday, so what is the new timescale for monitoring progress and reporting to Parliament? In her evidence to the committee on 19 March, the Deputy First Minister mentioned the potential for increased passenger and freight use of Prestwick. What steps has the Scottish Government been taking to investigate whether that is a realisable objective?

Nicola Sturgeon: I believe that there is a consensus in Parliament that the Government is right to be taking the action that it is taking to secure the future of Prestwick airport, and I am sure that Annabel Goldie will appreciate that the current management team has continued to engage appropriately with any interested party, to seek to bring new business to Prestwick and to explore opportunities for new business. However, we specifically asked the consultant to prepare an in-depth report for us.

As I said, he had three months in which to prepare that report; Annabel Goldie is right to say that that period has now expired, so I expect to take delivery of the report and to have time to consider it properly very soon. I will give the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee—and, as appropriate, the whole Parliament—a full update on where we intend to go with plans for Prestwick, both as regards the governance and management of the airport and as regards expanding its business opportunities as quickly as is reasonably practicable.

I know that all members will appreciate that it is vital that we take time to consider the best short-term, medium-term and long-term options for the airport so that we can reach the best possible position from which to deliver our objective of

returning the airport to profitability as soon as possible. I will share those plans as fully as possible with Parliament as soon as I am in a position to do so.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that Prestwick airport will, in its initial recovery phase, focus in the short term first on its capabilities as a maintenance, repair and overhaul airport, supported by the great engineering skills that are based on the airport perimeter and on the aero engineering training at Ayrshire colleges, and secondly on its ability to handle and promote wide-bodied air-freight transport for cargo exports?

Nicola Sturgeon: Chic Brodie is right to point to Prestwick airport's strengths; the MRO facility is one of the assets that are available to the airport.

To follow my answer to Annabel Goldie, I say that returning the airport to profitability will require improvements right across the business of the airport. That will include developing new passenger and freight services, as well as increasing the revenue from retail outlets and seeking to maximise the property portfolio of the airport.

Where we seek to strike the balance between those different objectives will depend on the views and recommendations that are made to us in the consultant's report. Once I have that report and have had the opportunity to consider it properly, I will be in a position to share more fully with Parliament what we see as being the particular interventions that we need to make with Prestwick in the short, medium and long terms to get it back to profitability as quickly as possible.

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): Is the level of monthly losses at Prestwick increasing? How does the Government intend to recover those losses and previous investment by the public purse?

Nicola Sturgeon: I provide regular updates on the airport's financial position—in particular, on the investment in it that the Government is making. I last did that when I last appeared before the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee.

James Kelly will recall that the principle upon which we acquired the airport is the principle of ensuring a return on taxpayer investment. That is required in order to make our acquisition of and intervention in the airport compliant with European Union state-aid regulations. That is the overriding objective. I have been, and will continue to be, up front about the fact that the airport will require investment if we are to achieve our longer-term objectives. Whatever we invest is designed to ensure a long-term return for the taxpayer. We will continue to report to Parliament as appropriate on the progress that we are making.

Scottish Water (Renewable Energy Generation)

6. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what plans Scottish Water has to promote the use of its assets for the generation of renewable energy. (S4O-03181)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Scottish Water already produces about 7 per cent of the energy that it consumes through hydro, wind and solar generation schemes on its assets. Scottish Water will continue to seek opportunities to invest directly or to work in partnership with others to increase renewable energy generation, when it is cost effective to do so.

Alison Johnstone: Scottish Water is a successful publicly-owned business that has huge potential for renewable energy generation. Under its new 2015 to 2021 business plan that it has just published, it will invest £11.2 million in hydro, wind and solar schemes to increase its renewables output to 75 gigawatt hours per year. The Scottish Government consultation on a hydro nation stated that Scottish Water had the potential to generate in excess of 1,000 gigawatt hours per year. Is that a lack of ambition? What more could Scottish Water do with its new powers under the Water Resources (Scotland) Act 2013? What is holding it back?

Nicola Sturgeon: I do not think it is a lack of ambition. What Alison Johnstone has just outlined has to be seen in the context of what Scottish Water exists to do and what its investment priorities will be during the next six years. In that period, Scottish Water will be required to invest £3.6 billion in our water and sewerage assets in order to deliver improved services. That investment implies growth in its need for energy because energy is needed to operate the installations that it will build.

Within its wholesale business, Scottish Water proposes to offset that higher energy demand with energy efficiency measures and the renewable energy that it generates from its assets. For example, as Alison Johnstone has indicated, it can use hydro power.

As I said in my original answer, Scottish Water has an annual energy requirement of 450 gigawatts and it generates approximately 7 per cent of the energy it consumes. However, through innovative use of its assets including treatment works, pipes, catchments, and pipelines, it is capable of significantly increasing that proportion and is working to do so. A further 350 gigawatts is generated at Whitelee wind farm through landlord arrangements and, by 2018, Scottish Water expects to generate more than 1,000 gigawatts

through its own investments in renewable energy and landlord arrangements.

All that represents significant ambition. It recognises the obligations that are on Scottish Water to be energy efficient and to reduce its carbon footprint as much as possible.

Public-private Partnerships/Private Finance Initiative Projects

7. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what estimate it has made of how much would have been saved if the PPP/PFI projects that were carried out during the previous Administration had been funded through the non-profit distributing model. (S4O-03182)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): The rates that are applicable to any project reflect the market conditions when the actual contract is signed, so it is not possible to assess exactly what savings might have been made.

The NPD model ensures that private sector returns are capped and that there is no dividend-bearing equity, which avoids the excessive returns and poor taxpayer value for money that were associated with past private finance initiative projects. NPD also enhances stakeholder involvement and ensures that any surpluses can be directed in favour of the public sector.

Kenneth Gibson: In North Ayrshire, annual PFI payments will increase from £11.1 million in 2007 to £16.1 million in 2037, meaning that ultimately, £400 million will be paid over 30 years for schools with a capital cost of only £81 million. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the profligacy of Labour and the Lib Dems means that local authorities are stuck paying increased PFI charges year on year and that rising payments are limiting North Ayrshire's ability to invest in jobs and services?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes, I agree. The fact of the matter is that the PFI approach that was used in the past has not delivered best value for the taxpayer. I assure Kenny Gibson that the mistakes that were made with earlier PFI contracts will not be repeated. It is vital that the NPD programme deliver value for taxpayers' money, and this Government intends to ensure that it does.

Culture and External Affairs

British Embassies (Support for Events)

1. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it receives from British embassies to

help promote major events such as homecoming Scotland 2014. (S4O-03186)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government is aware that embassies and consulates have provided assistance by promoting information about homecoming Scotland 2014 through their network of media and promotional contacts. More specifically, with the assistance of the consulates in Milan and Hamburg, VisitScotland organised and delivered media and trade events in those key cities to launch homecoming Scotland.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office network announced the launch of Scotland's 2013-14 winter festival campaign. St Andrew's day toolkits were sent to 11 of its 270 offices—in Toronto, Chicago, Boston, Virginia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York city, Washington DC, New York state, Brussels and Queensland—to support their celebrations.

Gil Paterson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that having Scottish embassies around the world will allow Scotland to be promoted 365 days a year, which will result in far greater awareness of what our country has to offer, which in turn will lead to greater opportunities for Scottish businesses throughout the world?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes, I do. I have put on record my appreciation of the support that the embassies provide under their current responsibilities. However, a Scottish embassy will have five core functions: commercial, to maximise commercial benefits for Scottish businesses; governmental, to ensure effective engagement with Governments and other public institutions; cultural, to promote Scottish culture internationally; development, to ensure Scotland's international development priorities and commitments are met; and of course consular support. As Gil Paterson has set out, with an independent Scotland, Scottish embassies will be promoting Scottish interests every day of every year.

Malawi (Support for Health-related Programmes)

2. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what health-related programmes it is supporting in Malawi. (S4O-03187)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government's international development fund for Malawi supports 16 health-related projects worth a total of more than £5 million: six health projects in funding round 2012-2015 and a further 10 projects in funding round 2013-2016. Those include a mobile clinic,

medical training and projects addressing health awareness, mental health, meningitis awareness, cancer treatment and community needs in maternal health. Further details of all our projects are on the Scottish Government website.

Dr Simpson: I am particularly interested in two aspects. One of those is midwifery, but I want to ask about the mental health side. I should declare my fellowship of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. The college has a charity that supports training of psychiatrists in Malawi, where there is a serious—indeed, dire—shortage. Has the Government considered the possibility of incentivising donations from charity? That leverage system seems to produce more funding.

Humza Yousaf: I put on record my acknowledgement of the work that Richard Simpson has done on this issue. He has addressed the issue of midwifery in the past and has raised awareness of issues around malaria.

We incentivise donations through some of our grant funding rounds, and we welcome match funding, for example in relation to the small grants scheme that we launched last September. We will continue to do that.

If there is a specific project that is looking into the matter, I will provide more details for Richard Simpson. However, as I said, such donations are incentivised, and match funding is welcome. Having done fundraising for non-governmental organisations in the past, I agree with him that it is certainly an easier way to get money out of donors.

Independence (Naval Vessels)

3. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many naval vessels it considers would be required to enforce a ban on European Union fishing fleets in Scottish waters if proposals for an independent Scotland's membership of the European Union were not accepted. (S4O-03188)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): An independent Scotland would continue EU membership and, as such, we would expect mutual access to fishing opportunities to continue.

Michael McMahon: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer. I do not know what question she was answering, but it was not the one that I asked.

If the First Minister is going to go to Bruges and threaten to use gunboat diplomacy if his negotiation skills fail, is it not a good idea to know the size of the fleet that would be required to enforce a ban? Is that really the way that we want

to look forward to the discussions we would have with the EU if Scotland ever became independent?

Fiona Hyslop: The First Minister did no such thing, and the member's supplementary question shows that he does not understand the difference between access to fishing opportunities in waters and access to navigation through waters.

It is just as well that the member is not the fisheries spokesperson for his party, because it is clear that he does not understand the current situation. Marine Scotland is currently responsible for fishery and marine protection in Scottish waters. It routinely monitors the activities of all non-Scottish vessels that are in our waters, using three offshore patrol vessels, two long-range aircrafts and satellite information that reports the position of vessels every two hours.

Of course, Mr McMahon's question highlights the current conventional capability gaps that have been created as a result of Westminster Government cuts. For example, there are no major surface vessels based in Scotland and no maritime patrol aircraft. That is an extraordinary and unacceptable gap, which has resulted in ships being dispatched from the south of England to the Moray Firth in response to Russian naval activity. That current gap also means that the United Kingdom has to rely on NATO allies to help to cover routine maritime patrol duties, a responsibility that an independent Scotland will take more seriously.

Perhaps Mr McMahon might want to do his research before coming to the chamber.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): The reply from the cabinet secretary indicates an interesting scenario. Can she confirm where, in the situation that is outlined in the question, those vessels would come from, given that there would no longer be Royal Navy support from the rest of the United Kingdom? Would we rent the vessels? Would we buy the vessels? What plan has she in mind?

Fiona Hyslop: I am sorry to have to repeat my point, but the Royal Navy currently does not provide support in terms of maritime fishery protection.

The main point is that we must consider the situation that we would find ourselves in. We agree with Sir David Edward that it would be absolutely absurd to have a situation in which Scotland would somehow not be a member of the EU in the 18-month period after a yes vote. We also accept that position of Professor James Crawford, who was paid by the UK Government to provide legal advice, that the 18-month estimate for negotiating membership is a realistic one.

I think that people should be aware of the maritime fisheries protection that currently takes place through Marine Scotland, which is part of the Scottish Government, and they should also recognise the commonsense position that has been set out consistently by this Government.

Independence (European Union Membership)

4. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the recent remarks by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs regarding an independent Scotland's entry into the European Union. (S4O-03189)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government rejects in its entirety the position set out by Mr Hague in his letter to the First Minister of 27 April. The First Minister has responded, and he has made clear in his reply that those comments show a complete lack of engagement by the UK Government on all of the issues—most specifically its continued refusal to present the Commission with a precise legal scenario on membership of an independent Scotland.

The biggest risk to Scotland's membership of the EU lies not in Scottish independence but in the possibility of a UK in/out referendum on EU membership.

Colin Beattie: Does the cabinet secretary agree that Mr Hague's claims that the UK has a proven track record on delivering for Scottish interests in the EU are at odds with Owen Paterson's recent reported breach on an agreement to make clear to European ministers Scotland's opposition to genetically modified crops? Does she further agree with me and the Electoral Reform Society's recent report "Close the Gap: Tackling Europe's democratic deficit" that the EU should improve the involvement of devolved Parliaments and regional representatives, especially when the member state representatives cannot be relied upon to represent their interests adequately?

Fiona Hyslop: I understand that the issue recently came to light in a committee appearance by Mr Paterson. He had agreed to raise at the March environment council the need for any EU agreement allowing member states to make their own decisions about growing GM crops to permit Scotland to make its own decisions and not be bound by the UK Government views. However, I understand that he failed to do so.

Currently, there is no facility for committees of the Scottish Parliament to hold UK ministers to account for the position that the UK adopts at the Council of Ministers. The Scottish ministers do not have the right to participate in Council meetings to

represent the Scottish interest. Only as an independent member state can Scotland's voice be heard at Council.

International Development Expenditure

5. Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether, in deciding its international development expenditure, it takes into account how developing countries balance meeting the needs and interests of business with those of people living in poverty. (S4O-03190)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): Yes. All our international development expenditure is focused on helping people who live in poverty in developing countries, in line with the millennium development goals and the development plans of our priority countries. As part of that, we seek to work alongside both the private sector and civil society to help foster a global partnership for development, which is MDG 8.

Siobhan McMahon: A recent Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund event that I co-hosted provided an opportunity to meet SCIAF and its partners from Columbia and hear at first hand about the impact of big business on that country's Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. We heard that rich landowners, armed groups and multinational companies—including companies that are registered in the United Kingdom and Scotland—are now forcing people off their land so that it can be used for mining, banana plantations, cattle ranching and drug trafficking.

Does the minister agree with SCIAF, which believes that Scotland can and should play its part in promoting ethical and responsible business practices? How will the Scottish Government take a proactive role in promoting human rights and responsible behaviour from Scottish businesses?

Humza Yousaf: Yes, I agree with SCIAF and with what Siobhan McMahon said. I did not get to meet the Colombian delegation this time, but I met them last year when they came round.

There are two ways that we can do what Siobhan McMahon suggests. One is domestically, by promoting that approach through the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill. As she knows, we have included in the bill a section about ethically and fairly traded goods. That shows what we can do in domestic legislation. We are also working alongside the Scottish Human Rights Commission, which has developed its action plan on human rights, part of which includes determining how we can incorporate what are known as the Ruggie principles, which are the United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights.

We can do what is suggested domestically, through legislation, and we can do it through the national action plan. I am happy to provide Siobhan McMahon with more details if she requires them.

European Union Membership

6. Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it has received advice from the European Commission that, if Scotland separates from the United Kingdom, it would need to apply to the EU as a new member state. (S4O-03191)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): We have received no advice from the Commission to that effect. Indeed, the Commission has made it clear that it will not issue an opinion until it is presented with a "precise scenario" from the UK Government. I would welcome that, but the UK Government has repeatedly refused to make a joint approach to the Commission with the precise legal scenario on Scottish independence.

The Scottish Government proposes that an independent Scotland negotiate from within the EU, via an amendment under article 48 of the Treaty on European Union, on the terms to be agreed with other member states, as outlined on page 221 of "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland".

The Scottish Government recognises that it will be for the EU member states, meeting under the auspices of the Council of Ministers, to take forward the most appropriate procedure under which an independent Scotland will become a signatory to the EU treaties at the point at which it becomes independent, taking into account Scotland's status as an EU jurisdiction of 40 years' standing.

Hugh Henry: The cabinet secretary may wish to read the letter written by Viviane Reding, the vice president of the Commission, to the European and External Relations Committee. It states:

"Under Article 49 of the Treaty ... any European state which respects the principles ... of the ... European Union may apply to become a member of the EU."

However, it also says:

"a new independent region would, by the fact of its independence, become a third country with respect to the Union and the Treaties would, from the day of its independence, not apply anymore on its territory."

Does the cabinet secretary agree with Viviane Reding?

Fiona Hyslop: I discussed Viviane Reding's letter with the European and External Relations Committee. Her opinion does not concern the particular circumstances of Scotland, as she was

talking about the conventional route for enlargement under article 49. As I have just set out, the Scottish Government's proposal is via article 48. Moreover, Mr Henry might be interested in correspondence that I placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre in April, after a recent request for information to the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. On 1 April 2014, we received responses from Dr Marianne Klingbeil, who is the deputy secretary general of the Commission, and Jakob Thomsen, who is from the general secretariat of the Council, both stating that neither institution holds an analysis on Scotland's membership of the EU under articles 48 or 49. I refer the member to those letters, which were placed in SPICe on 22 April.

International Development Programme (Support for Youth Volunteering)

7. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government how its international development programme supports young people wanting to carry out voluntary work overseas. (S4O-03192)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf):

The Scottish Government has committed £9 million per year to its international development fund. Although the fund does not offer direct financial support to young people who want to carry out voluntary work overseas, we provide funding to the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland and the Scotland Malawi Partnership. The member will be aware of those organisations, which provide information to young people about volunteering opportunities. On 31 March 2014, the Scotland Malawi Partnership hosted a youth congress, which I attended along with 200 young people from across Scotland. The event included information stalls and exhibitions on volunteering in Malawi.

Margaret Mitchell: The minister will be aware that the Department for International Development in East Kilbride funds a successful programme for young people to volunteer abroad—the international citizens service—and that approximately 600 people work in the East Kilbride DFID office. Will the minister confirm that such programmes will remain open to Scottish young people if Scotland separates from the rest of the UK and that the 600 people who are employed in the administration of schemes to improve some of the world's most deprived areas can be assured that their jobs will be safe in an independent Scotland?

Humza Yousaf: Yes. When I was at the European and External Relations Committee, I

made the point—I have made it various times since then—that the Government has promised continuity of employment for those who are employed in DFID and in other reserved functions here in Scotland.

I find it poor when UK Government ministers use that issue, particularly when they come up to lecture Scotland about not going independent. I know that Margaret Mitchell is not doing that, but I was quite upset by some of the comments of her colleagues Alan Duncan and Justine Greening, in using the poorest people in the world as a political football in the debate. We should be very much above that.

Scotland will have a great contribution to make. Historically, we have made a great contribution to tackling global poverty, so let us continue to do that. As an independent country, we will of course work with DFID, the United States Agency for International Development and anybody from across the world who wants to fight global poverty.

Poland (Visit)

8. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it next plans to visit Poland. (S4O-03193)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I have no immediate plans to visit Poland, but I have just returned from a two-day visit to Krakow and Warsaw, which provided great opportunities to deepen diplomatic relations, promote cultural co-operation and develop business links.

Christian Allard: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the 160,000 people from other EU states—including myself and those from Poland—who have chosen to live and work in Scotland are making a massive contribution to Scotland's economy and culture, and that only a yes vote in September will ensure that we keep our status as EU residents, with the extra democratic benefit of the right to vote in every election in an independent Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: Last week, I visited the Polish club in Edinburgh. I recognise the critical contribution that the more than 60,000 Poles living in Scotland make to our economy. As the member says, there are 160,000 people here from other EU states. It is important that we state that those workers, who work hard and contribute to our society, are most welcome here and that we expect that welcome to continue as Scotland remains in the EU.

Bedroom Tax and Discretionary Housing Payments

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on the bedroom tax and discretionary housing payments. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:40

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): In the light of correspondence that I received from the United Kingdom Government on Friday, I wanted to take an early opportunity to update Parliament on the Scottish Government's plans to mitigate fully the impacts of the bedroom tax on the 72,000 families across Scotland who are affected by it.

The Scottish Government has been consistent in our view that the only legal way to make regular and on-going payments directly to tenants to compensate them for the loss of housing benefit that has been suffered as a result of the bedroom tax is through discretionary housing payments that are administered by local authorities. We have also been clear that the cost of fully mitigating the bedroom tax would be up to £50 million a year.

As members are aware, councils will receive £15 million this year from the Department for Work and Pensions to spend on discretionary housing payments, which leaves a potential shortfall of £35 million in the funding that will be required to mitigate the bedroom tax fully. As members are also aware, John Swinney made that additional £35 million available in the Scottish Government's budget for this year, with the express intention of fully mitigating the impact of that tax.

Some £20 million of that additional funding has already been allocated to councils. I can advise members that the distribution of that money among councils was agreed at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities leaders meeting on 25 April. That agreement allows us to target the funding as much as possible according to need. I am happy to confirm that, as a result, 12 councils already have the funds that they need to mitigate fully the bedroom tax in their areas. The remaining 20 councils have been allocated funding up to the limit of the Westminster-imposed cap on how much each council is allowed to spend on discretionary housing payments. However, that still leaves them short of what they need to mitigate fully the bedroom tax.

The remaining £15 million that the Scottish Government has set aside is intended to make up

that shortfall, but it cannot be provided to local authorities until the DHP cap is lifted. That is why, on 31 January, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, to ask him to lift the cap on DHPs. That move would cost the DWP absolutely nothing.

Since then, we have written on a further five occasions. I also raised the issue personally with the Deputy Prime Minister at the joint ministerial committee in London. I am grateful to the convener of the Welfare Reform Committee, who wrote to the DWP in similar terms, and to a number of organisations outside Parliament, including COSLA, that have made the same demand of the DWP.

It is fair to say that the delay in receiving a response from the UK Government has been deeply frustrating. Of course, while we have been pressing for an answer we have also been considering an alternative method of getting money to those who need it, but it has always been the case that DHPs are the best and most effective means of doing so. I was therefore pleased finally to receive a positive response from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell, on Friday, in which he stated:

"I am aware that the Scottish Government has indicated that it would like to spend additional funds on DHPs in Scotland ... I am writing to you today to offer to provide Scottish Ministers with a power to set the statutory cap in Scotland. I propose to do so using section 63 of the Scotland Act 1998."

It is important to stress—as will be obvious from the quotation that I have just read out—that the UK Government has not agreed to lift the cap, but has agreed instead to transfer powers to the Scottish ministers to allow us to do so. I welcome that, but it means that the legal process to effect the transfer of power will have to be completed before the Scottish Government can lay an order to lift the cap. As members will appreciate, that two-stage process will take longer than would have been the case had the UK Government decided to lift the cap itself. It is therefore vital that we move to get the process under way and completed as soon as possible.

Section 63 of the Scotland Act 1998 provides an order-making power for the transfer of executive functions from UK ministers to the Scottish ministers. In this case, it is proposed to transfer to the Scottish Government executive responsibility for the exercise of the power that is contained in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 to vary the DHP cap.

The procedure for making a section 63 order is set out in the Scotland Act 1998. First, the terms of a draft order require agreement between the Scottish and UK Governments. The order then

requires to be laid before both Parliaments for agreement and, ultimately, it has to be considered and approved by the Privy Council. I have written to David Mundell accepting the UK Government's offer to transfer the power and to say that my officials will work with UK Government officials on the detail of the order. I can also advise Parliament that I will meet David Mundell tomorrow to discuss the draft order and the timescales for agreeing the final terms for laying it before both Parliaments and for having it considered by the Privy Council.

I undertake to write to MSPs as soon as I can to provide an update on the likely timescales for each stage of that process, including—of course—the parliamentary scrutiny stage and, indeed, the timescale for completion of the process. When the section 63 order has taken effect, Scottish ministers will then be able to lay an order varying or lifting the cap on DHPs. We will ensure that the order allows utilisation of the entirety of the £50 million that is available. We will also ensure that the order is laid as quickly as possible.

Although there is, as I am sure members will appreciate, still much work to be done to ensure that the process is completed smoothly and quickly, it is important today to stress that local authorities should now plan on the basis that all losses of housing benefit that are incurred by social tenants because of the bedroom tax can be fully mitigated. As I said earlier, £35 million of the available funding has already been allocated and 12 councils already have sufficient funds to mitigate fully the bedroom tax in their areas; those that still have a shortfall can now plan on the basis that that shortfall will be met in full.

I will shortly respond to a letter from the president of COSLA and will give local authorities these reassurances in writing. I assure Parliament that we will start working with COSLA immediately to ensure that distribution of the remaining funds will get the money to where it is needed in order that the bedroom tax is fully mitigated in every local authority area in Scotland.

I want today to encourage local authorities to review their discretionary housing payment procedures to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to tenants applying for a DHP. The point about encouraging and enabling tenants to apply for DHPs is a very important one. The Scottish Government is able to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax; unfortunately, however, we are not yet legally able to abolish it. That means that tenants are still legally responsible for the rent that is due as a result of the reduction in their housing benefit. It is important, therefore, to send this very clear message to social tenants today: If you are affected by the bedroom tax, help is available, but

you must apply for this help. You must engage with your landlord and apply for a DHP as soon as possible to enable you to pay the shortfall in your rent, and you should do so even if you have been refused a DHP in the past.

Let me make it clear today that as a result of Scottish Government action, there will be no need for anyone to fall into rent arrears or to face eviction as a result of the bedroom tax. *[Applause.]* I hope that this statement has been helpful in setting out the steps that we now require to take to make good on our commitment to mitigate fully that iniquitous tax. I am proud that this Parliament has come together to protect the people who are affected by the bedroom tax, and I want to thank members in the chamber, including those on the Labour benches, who have worked with us to achieve that.

However, I will close with this reflection. There can surely be no better or stronger illustration of the need for this Parliament to have powers over welfare than the scandal of the bedroom tax. It simply cannot be right—it is not right—that a tax is imposed on Scotland against our will by a Westminster Government that we did not vote for, thereby forcing the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to divert money from other devolved responsibilities in order to mitigate its impact, and then, to add insult to injury, for us to have to jump through legal hoops to be able to spend the money that we have set aside. That makes no sense whatsoever.

What would make sense is for this Parliament, rather than having to mitigate the bedroom tax, to instead have the power to ensure that we do not have a bedroom tax in the first place. With full powers over welfare and taxation, this Government and this Parliament will be able to make the right decisions for the people of Scotland on such vitally important matters. That will be a much better position for all of us.

The Presiding Officer: The Deputy First Minister will now take questions on the issues that have been raised in her statement. I intend to allow 20 minutes for questions, after which we must move on to the next item of business. It will be helpful if members who wish to ask a question press their request-to-speak buttons now.

I say to members at the outset that we will be extremely tight for time all afternoon, so I ask that questions and answers be kept as short as possible. In that way, I hope to allow everybody to get in.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of her statement.

This day has been a long time coming; in fact, it has been over a year since Scottish Labour called

for the SNP to help people who are struggling with the bedroom tax. The SNP has rejected our calls at every turn—preferring to use people's misery to boost its vote in the referendum instead of using the powers that it has now. We should be in no doubt that it has those powers. We demonstrated that, but the SNP preferred to blame the Tories instead of looking at what it can do now to protect people.

It took mass campaigns, petitions to Parliament and a member's bill to force the SNP to act. It bowed to that pressure last September and announced an extra £20 million as a response to the member's bill, but that amount fell well short of what was required. Finally, at the budget in February—again, in response to Labour's persistent calls—the SNP finally agreed to mitigate the bedroom tax fully. At every step of the way, we have pushed and pulled the SNP along. The delay is the SNP's. I want to know why it has taken more than a year for action to be taken by this Scottish Government.

Although I absolutely welcome the transfer of power from the UK Government to the Scottish Government using a section 63 order, we could have done this a lot quicker. We need to be swift in implementation so that the burden of the bedroom tax is lifted from everyone in Scotland. The cabinet secretary agrees that the bedroom tax is wrong and she agrees that it should be fully mitigated. Does she therefore agree, given the underspends in some local authority areas, to cancel out any bedroom tax debt for 2013-14?

Nicola Sturgeon: It did not take Jackie Baillie long to shatter any sense of consensus.

I have already, in my statement, made it clear that I agree with Jackie Baillie about the importance of moving swiftly now to get the powers and to exercise them, and I undertake—again—on behalf of the Scottish Government to do everything in our power to do so.

The fact of the matter is that the Scottish Government has, all along, done everything that we could within our powers and our resources to mitigate the bedroom tax. It is not easy for John Swinney to find millions of pounds to mitigate a policy that has been imposed by a Westminster Government, but last year we found £20 million and this year John Swinney has found £35 million. It is interesting that the Labour Administration in Wales last year found a grand total of £1.3 million, and so far this year has contributed nothing, as far as I am aware, to mitigation of the bedroom tax. Perhaps Labour should spend more time directing its remarks at its own colleagues.

In continuing to attack the Scottish Government on the bedroom tax, Labour is aiming at the wrong target. The responsibility for the bedroom tax and

its consequences lie with the UK Government. We are doing what we can to mitigate it, and that should be welcomed, but mitigating a policy will never be as good as having the power to abolish it. That is why Labour's position on the matter, however sincere it might be, will always lack credibility for as long as it is content to leave the powers over welfare in the hands of a Tory Government at Westminster.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I take this opportunity—for no one else will—to pay tribute to the work of David Mundell MP for his great efforts to ensure that an alternative plan was put in place, should this Government have decided to take it up; for his shuttle diplomacy around Scotland's local authorities; and now for the solution that has been placed in the Government's hands, which not only demonstrates the effectiveness of the devolved settlement but solves the problem by devolving additional powers, which is something that this Government has always been keen on.

While this Government and the majority Opposition party argue about the success of their various campaigns, may I take this opportunity to ask one question that no one else has asked? What now for the tens of thousands of Scottish households that have been assessed as being overcrowded and who are languishing on waiting lists, in need of rehousing? Will this Government concentrate efforts and resources on delivering for those people, instead of claiming victory while ignoring the problem that we were trying to address?

Nicola Sturgeon: I look forward to meeting David Mundell tomorrow and I am grateful to him for doing what Iain Duncan Smith has failed to do for three months, which is to reply to the Scottish Government's request. I give David Mundell credit for that. To this day, I am not sure why it has taken the UK Government so long to decide to pass a power to the Scottish Government to allow us to do the work to lift the cap. It seems to me that the UK Government could have agreed to do that very quickly.

I welcome all additional powers, so I welcome the transfer of power to enable us to mitigate the bedroom tax, which we will use to the full. However, the additional powers that I want are those that will enable us to ensure that we do not have a bedroom tax in Scotland in the first place. I am talking about full powers over welfare, so that we can stop the Tory Government dismantling our welfare state and instead build a welfare state that fits the needs and values of people throughout this country.

On Alex Johnstone's question about housing investment, this Government is investing significant sums of money in affordable housing.

We are also, in the teeth of opposition from Alex Johnstone and his colleagues, abolishing the right to buy, so that we can safeguard social housing in order to meet the needs of people who rely on it.

We will continue to do that, but we will never be part of an attempt—such as the Tory Government has clearly made—to penalise people for what it obviously considers to be the crime of being poor. We are on the side of people who are struggling to get out of poverty. That is the difference between this Government and the Tory Government at Westminster.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The DWP currently provides £15 million of the £50 million that is required to mitigate the bedroom tax. Does the Deputy First Minister share my concern that the UK Government might choose to withdraw that funding at any time?

Nicola Sturgeon: Yes. That is a real concern and it is something on which we will continue to engage closely with the UK Government. Until such time as this Parliament has full powers over welfare—I hope that it will be sooner rather than later—it is important that the UK Government continue to provide that support.

I go back to my original point. The imposition of wrongheaded policies that require money to be taken from other areas in order to mitigate their impact is not the best way of governing a country. It would be far better if this Parliament had the ability to decide on the kind of welfare policies that we want and to fund them properly, rather than being in the ridiculous situation of having to pick up the pieces of the mess that Westminster has made.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I thank the Deputy First Minister for the advance copy of her statement. She knows that I have taken a close interest in the matter for some time in relation to, first, increasing the DHP funds that the UK Government provides, and secondly, lifting the cap. John Swinney and I have been in regular dialogue about the matter, and I am pleased that change is about to be made.

I spoke to the Secretary of State for Scotland in the past few days, and he told me that the order to which the minister referred in her statement will be processed with the necessary speed, so that we can get on with it. I tell the Deputy First Minister that I will continue to provide constructive support in this matter.

Nicola Sturgeon: I take the opportunity to thank Willie Rennie for his contribution. I know that he has tried to help to get us into the position in which we are now in. I welcome his report of a commitment from the secretary of state to a swift process; I will be looking to pin down that

commitment when I meet David Mundell tomorrow.

I welcome Willie Rennie's offer to continue to be constructive. I regret that we have a Tory-Liberal Government at Westminster that is imposing a policy that necessitates our efforts to mitigate it; nevertheless, I take Willie Rennie's contribution in good faith and will continue to ensure that we work together in Parliament to do what we think is right, which is to take away the impact of this iniquitous policy.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On the basis that the Scottish Government's mitigation of the bedroom tax means that funds must be diverted from other Scottish budgets to pay for Westminster mistakes, does the Deputy First Minister think that it is misleading and absurd of the UK Government to claim that an independent Scotland could not meet the social protection needs of her people?

Nicola Sturgeon: That claim is not only ridiculous, but completely and utterly false. The fact of the matter is that social protection payments are more affordable in Scotland than they are in the rest of the UK. They take up a smaller proportion of our tax revenues, our gross domestic product and our economy as a whole, so we can more than afford to support a decent welfare system of our own.

What we lack in Scotland and in this Parliament is the power to determine what that system looks like. The time has long passed when we were prepared to watch Westminster Governments dismantle the welfare state; instead, we should take the powers that would allow us to build one that is fit for purpose and of which this Parliament and country can be proud.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The Deputy First Minister said in her statement that no one need fall into rent arrears or face eviction due to the bedroom tax. That is very welcome. However, the point is to ensure that no one affected need pay it at all, which is an objective that we share. Will she categorically confirm that any tenant affected by the bedroom tax who applies for DHP support will automatically get it? What plans does she have to ensure, proactively, that such tenants apply?

Nicola Sturgeon: My answer to that question will be in two parts. First, Iain Gray knows as well as I do that local authorities administer discretionary housing payments and that they require to receive, assess and adjudicate the applications. I make it absolutely and unequivocally clear that the purpose of the money that the Scottish Government is making available to local authorities in this year in our budget is to ensure that no tenant is affected by the bedroom

tax. We will expect local authorities to operate the DHP system and provide the money that we have made available in a way that delivers that objective. If Iain Gray or any other member has concerns that that is not happening, I am sure that they will feel able and free to bring that to my attention.

I turn to the second part of Iain Gray's question. I am grateful to him for giving me the chance to reiterate a point that I made clear in my statement. If I have a concern about this, it is that people reading the newspapers, watching the television and hearing the statement may think that they no longer have to think about the bedroom tax. However, we are not able to abolish the bedroom tax. The legal responsibility to pay the shortfall in housing benefit lies with the tenant. The help is available as a result of the money that we are making available, but tenants must apply for it.

I hope that all MSPs will help to communicate that message through their constituency networks. I know that local authorities and housing associations will take the time and make the effort to communicate that message to their tenants, and we in the Scottish Government will also do everything that we can to make sure that that message gets across fully.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I welcome the eventual decision to allow the Scottish Government to lift the cap. That will be very reassuring to the people I know who suffer from motor neuron disease and live in adapted homes and who were told by Lord Freud to take in a lodger or work longer hours, or risk losing their homes, as some already have. Surely full control of welfare is the only way to protect those vulnerable people.

Nicola Sturgeon: Christina McKelvie raises an important point because, as members are aware, a significant proportion of the households affected by the bedroom tax contain at least one person with a disability, which is one of the reasons—it is not the only reason; it is one of the many reasons—that makes this tax so deeply unfair, wrong and iniquitous.

We need to do what we can to mitigate the bedroom tax, which is why I have set out the action that we are taking. Christina McKelvie is correct—this takes us back to the point that Iain Gray just raised—that we are not able to abolish the bedroom tax. I want us to be in a position in which we are not asking tenants to apply for help to enable them to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax; I want us to be in a position in which we can abolish the bedroom tax. As a Government, we have made it clear that, if we get those powers, we will immediately exercise them to ensure that the bedroom tax is, once and for all, a thing of the past.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill)

(Lab): The cabinet secretary has quite rightly raised concerns about the timescale of the introduction of the section 63 order. I think that the last time that that procedure was used in the Parliament was in relation to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee in 2008. We could be looking at having the order in front of Parliament in November or December at the earliest. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that that is the case?

In the meantime, the cabinet secretary says that that is the only way in which moneys can be got to those who are affected. However, some local authorities have told the Welfare Reform Committee that they have ideas and schemes for providing support and that those methods have been approved by Audit Scotland.

Is the cabinet secretary able to assure us that no local authority that has a mechanism for getting assistance to people will be prevented from using it and forced to pursue the Scottish Government's preferred method of DHPs?

Nicola Sturgeon: I understand and share some of Michael McMahon's concerns about timescales; indeed, that is why I put such an emphasis on the issue in my statement. I will come back to that matter in a second.

Assuming that, as is our clear intention, we are able to get the power transferred and to exercise it timeously to get to local authorities the full £50 million—£35 million of which will come from the Scottish Government—I believe that there will be no requirement for local authorities to look at alternative schemes. Having looked very closely—as I am sure Michael McMahon has—at the examples that he is talking about, I think that no alternative scheme works as well or as directly as getting money to tenants through discretionary housing payments, and it is our intention and objective to ensure that we use that route to channel all the available funding.

I am obviously aware of the precedents for the use of section 63 orders. I repeat what I said in my statement: following discussions with David Mundell, I will update MSPs as soon as I can on what I consider to be the likely timescales for every stage of the process. It has to be done as quickly as possible, and I certainly hope to be in the position of bringing an order to Parliament earlier than the timescale indicated by Michael McMahon, which is based on precedent. However, I will be in a better position to advise MSPs once I have had the discussions that I referred to, and I certainly take heart from the secretary of state's comments, as reported by Willie Rennie, which suggests a willingness by the UK Government to move as quickly as possible on the matter. The Scottish Government will certainly be willing to move quickly.

The process need not be overly complicated. Let us get the power transferred; once that happens, we can move quickly to exercise it.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):

Although I welcome the announcement, does the Deputy First Minister consider that the new power will assist people who have been left with no choice but to use food banks to feed themselves and their family? If not, what support is the Scottish Government able to provide in that respect?

Nicola Sturgeon: Taking away the impact of the bedroom tax will obviously help a lot of people. As I indicated, more than 70,000 families are affected by the bedroom tax, and they are the people who will be helped by the action that I have outlined this afternoon.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the bedroom tax is but one aspect of the welfare cuts and changes that the Westminster Government is implementing, and many other changes are having a big impact on people. It is estimated that, cumulatively, those changes will drive up to an additional 100,000 children into poverty by 2020, and the changes as a whole are driving the explosion in demand for food banks.

It is a scandal that in a country as rich as Scotland so many people are reliant on food banks but, as the member will be aware, we as a Government are seeking to help with the provision of food banks as much as possible. I recently announced additional funding for that, and we will continue to help. However, we need to get ourselves into a position where we are not sitting by passively while policies get implemented that consign so many more of our children to a reliance on food banks and drive them into poverty, and that will happen only when we are responsible for designing our own welfare system.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Although both the Government and the Opposition should be proud of their work on defeating the bedroom tax in the social rented sector, the Deputy First Minister will be aware that it was introduced first in the private rented sector. Does she agree that, with property for social rent unavailable and owner occupation unaffordable to many people, the private rented sector is not just a free market choice and that our long-term ambition should be to reverse the introduction of the bedroom tax in the private rented sector in an independent Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon: Although I have great sympathy with Patrick Harvie's view, he will understand why with the powers and resources that we have at the moment we are right to focus on the bedroom tax in the social rented sector; indeed, I know that he agrees with our approach.

He will be aware of the Government's commitment to improving the provision and quality of accommodation in the private rented sector; nevertheless, I certainly have a lot of sympathy with the long-term ambition that he has asked me to share.

In the meantime, of course, we must continue to do as much as we can to provide good-quality social rented accommodation to ensure that we do not end up in the situation that Patrick Harvie has described where people cannot afford to own property and do not want to be in the private rented sector. We will continue to focus on a range of things to achieve that ambition.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the wide disparity in DHP awards, with an average award of £710 in Aberdeen, compared with £140 in South Ayrshire, and 45 application refusals in Stirling, compared with 7,500 in Glasgow. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that the money that it is responsible for distributing through DHPs is awarded equitably and fairly?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will repeat something that I said to Iain Gray, which is a statement of fact: it is the responsibility of local authorities to administer DHPs and we do not have the power to direct authorities as to exactly how they do that. We have made it very clear that the whole purpose of making the money available and of getting the power to increase the cap is to enable enough money to be available through DHPs to mitigate the bedroom tax fully. The decisions that are being made on DHP applications have to reflect that.

The average DHP award overall was £357 in the last financial year, and more than 70,000 awards were made in total. We have gone to great lengths to make that money available and to get the power that we need to spend it.

To be fair to local authorities, in the main, they dislike the bedroom tax and its impact as much as the Scottish Government and the Opposition do. I know that they will wish to work with us to ensure that what I have announced today has the effect that all of us want it to have.

The Presiding Officer: My apologies to Sandra White and Alex Rowley for the fact that I was not able to call them. We need to move on to the next item of business.

Energy and Climate Change

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09927, in the name of Alison Johnstone, on energy and climate change.

15:11

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): It is generally agreed that our energy policy should deliver three things: a secure supply; energy at an affordable cost; and energy that is low in climate-changing carbon emissions. In the face of relentless price hikes by the big six energy companies that dominate the United Kingdom market, affordability is very important, particularly here in Scotland, with our northern climate, higher energy prices and rural homes.

If we take into account the impact of price falls in the United States and the fact that gas produces fewer emissions than coal when burned, it is perhaps not surprising that there are advocates for the exploration and extraction of unconventional gas. The Prime Minister has asserted that unconventional gas has "real potential" to drive down energy prices. He assures us that the benefits are clear.

The belief that unconventional gas will push prices down is a false hope, however. Lord Browne, chairperson of the fracking company Cuadrilla and key UK Government adviser, understands that reality. George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has been forced to understand the same. He told the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee that he did not want to "overpromise" on gas prices. The same committee also heard from industry representatives and academics, including Bloomberg, EDF, E.ON and the UK Energy Research Centre, that the impact on household bills is very likely to be insignificant. We can put to bed the argument that unconventional gas is going to make bills cheaper.

Extracting gas onshore in the UK will be much more challenging than doing so in the US. In any case, prices will still be set by the integrated European gas market. For example, Dart Energy will sell to SSE at market rates. Lord Stern was right when he dismissed the Prime Minister's claims of cheaper energy from shale as "baseless economics."

It is my view and that of my party and many others that unconventional gas extraction is not a solution to our energy and climate challenges but a symptom of a much wider problem. Having exhausted the easier-to-extract energy sources, we are resorting to more extreme methods of energy extraction. We are digging and drilling

deeper into some of the world's most stunning, pristine and remote locations—and, who knows, possibly soon in a field near your home.

We know that energy companies already hold far more fossil fuel reserves than it is safe to burn. The “Unburnable Carbon 2013” report calculates that

“Between 60-80% of coal, oil and gas reserves of publicly listed companies are ‘unburnable’ if the world is to have a chance of not exceeding global warming of 2°C.”

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Energy Agency have calculated the amount of carbon emissions that we can safely put into the atmosphere and they conclude that the only way to avoid dangerous climate change is to leave a large proportion of our known oil, coal and gas in the ground.

Dart Energy has submitted planning applications for the UK's first unconventional gas development to involve production rather than solely exploration, 30 or so miles away from this chamber. Experts at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research in Manchester describe the Government's approach to unconventional gas as a bellwether of its commitment to leadership on climate change. Senior analysts at French bank Société Générale say that they are looking at what happens in the UK as being at the forefront of the industry in Europe.

Dart Energy's development is the most advanced unconventional gas project in the UK. In Scotland, we have the opportunity to act on the commitments and promises of leadership on climate change by simply saying no to a whole new set of fossil fuel problems. We can rule unconventional gas out of bounds in Scotland.

Communities around Airth, Falkirk and Stirling have had long-standing concerns about their health and that of the local environment should more coal-bed methane wells go ahead. They were astonished to find out that test drilling had happened without their knowledge. Even a council leader claimed that he was unaware of it.

Campaigners in Canonbie, near Dumfries, continue to fight the threat to their area from the second-most advanced project in Scotland. That project has revealed a loophole whereby permission to extract coal-bed methane could be converted into permission for fracking without proper scrutiny.

A vast area of the central belt can be licensed for unconventional gas. Oil barons from the US are highlighting a process called underground coal gasification, which would involve burning coal seams under the Firth of Forth and off Fife.

I do not want energy projects that threaten the health of communities and local environments. We

do not need them. We are at the tipping point of producing the majority of our electricity from renewable sources. Analysis from energy consultants Garrad Hassan in “The Power of Scotland Secured” report from Friends of the Earth shows that, even with a growing demand for electricity, as heating switches from gas to electricity, we can power Scotland with a mix of renewables, pumped storage and a smart grid. That is even before we get better at investing in energy efficiency models.

There is public support for renewables—the level is a whopping 80 per cent, according to the most recent Department of Energy and Climate Change-commissioned poll. We can contrast that with the growing opposition to fracking. YouGov polling that was released yesterday reveals Scotland to be the UK nation that most opposes fracking. Eighty per cent of people opposed UK Government plans to allow underground drilling without landowner permission.

We do not know how much gas is available, but we know that the production time will be measured in years and decades and not in hundreds of years. We know for sure that unconventional gas will require a multimillion-pound investment and that production will not peak for another decade—and probably more—just as we plan to decarbonise.

We all know that we have, unfortunately, missed the first two of our climate targets. Even though the emissions trend is going in the right direction, it is vital to bolster the credibility of our world-leading legislation. The third target will be reported on soon.

“The Energy Report” by WWF concluded that by 2050 all the world's energy could be provided cleanly, renewably and affordably. The report looked at barriers to the transition. One of the biggest barriers is that, globally, more money is being invested in dirty fossil fuels than in clean renewables.

In its briefing for the debate, WWF Scotland says:

“Having rightly attracted the attention of the world for its ambitious Climate Change Act and its commitment to climate justice, it's critical that the Scottish Government and Parliament now fulfil the promises under the Act and reap the benefits presented by the low-carbon transition ... Scotland's commitments to meet its obligations under the Climate Change Act, its international reputation for climate change, its policy to decarbonise the energy system ... and its 100% renewables target will seriously lack credibility if Scotland were to go down the route of facilitating or encouraging an alternative fossil fuel.”

With WWF and Friends of the Earth Scotland, I urge the Government to say no to unconventional gas extraction in Scotland. A ban on unconventional gas in Scotland would focus our

efforts on truly renewable sources, rather than scraping the bottom of the fossil fuel barrel.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the significant public opposition to new methods of fossil fuel extraction such as fracking and coal-bed methane; notes that energy companies already hold far more fossil fuel reserves than it is safe to burn; agrees with the UK Energy and Climate Change Committee and many others, such as the chairman of Cuadrilla and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that developing unconventional gas in the UK will likely have no effect on the cost of energy for households; opposes the UK Government's extensive tax breaks for the industry and what it sees as a bribe to local authorities to approve development; supports communities in Falkirk, Stirling, Dumfries and Galloway and across the central belt who are campaigning against unconventional gas, and calls on the Scottish Government to implement a ban on unconventional fossil fuel extraction in Scotland in order to protect communities, safeguard local environments and focus investment on renewable energy, given the importance of meeting all targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, the third of which is due to be reported to the Parliament imminently.

15:20

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I welcome the debate that the Green Party has initiated today on energy and climate change. It provides an opportunity for us to consider the range of measures that the Scottish Government is taking to develop the very strong opportunity that we have in Scotland to produce energy.

We are a country that is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Our conventional oil and gas sector continues to be a tremendous asset to the Scottish economy. The sector employs more than 200,000 people in Scotland and, since the 1970s, when resources were first recovered, it has provided more than £300 billion in taxation revenues to Westminster. The future of the sector continues to look promising, with Oil & Gas UK predicting that a further 24 billion barrels of oil are still recoverable. That figure translates into a potential wholesale value of £1.5 trillion if it is managed properly. That has a tremendous potential to transform local communities across Scotland.

The oil and gas sector also represents a significant export and internationalisation opportunity for Scotland. The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, is currently in the United States at the offshore technology conference, which brings together many organisations involved in oil and gas. There is a significant presence at the conference of Scottish companies that are trading around the world as a major part of a global industry.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Mr Swinney knows that I agree with him on the importance of the oil and gas sector. Can he enlighten us as to when he intends to bring forward his revised estimates for revenue from the sector?

John Swinney: I told Parliament that I would bring those forward in the coming weeks and that is exactly what I intend to do to assist the debate.

While we recognise the importance of a vibrant industry in the North Sea, the Scottish Government is actively working towards the transition to a low-carbon economy. In that respect I agree entirely with the general thrust of Alison Johnstone's speech about the importance of ensuring that we develop the opportunities that exist to secure the aims and opportunities of a low-carbon economy, and the Government has worked tirelessly within a stable policy framework to promote and develop a renewables industry in Scotland. That strategy is now bearing considerable fruit.

By any measure, Scotland's renewable energy sector is going from strength to strength. We know that we have an estimated 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind potential, 25 per cent of Europe's tidal energy potential and 10 per cent of Europe's capacity for wave power. We are therefore determined as a Government to ensure that we capture that opportunity and we have set out a framework to achieve that by establishing stretching targets that will enable us to meet at least 30 per cent of Scotland's overall energy demand from renewable sources by 2020, including the target to meet the equivalent of 100 per cent of gross annual electricity demand from renewables by 2020, with an interim target of 50 per cent by 2015. By any measure, the Government has put in place a clear, robust and consistent policy framework that enables us to achieve those objectives.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): In view of recent announcements by electricity companies about the offshore renewables sector, does the cabinet secretary share any of my concerns about how that very important aspect of achieving a low-carbon economy can be driven forward?

John Swinney: I certainly do not think that the uncertainty that has been created by the electricity market reform process undertaken by the UK Government has helped investors to make decisions about the offshore sector. However, we now have some clarity in that respect and, obviously, the Scottish Government is heavily engaged to ensure that we secure these opportunities.

Members will ask why the transition to the low-carbon economy is important. It is vital, because it

is central to our efforts to tackle climate change. Scotland's climate change legislation commits us to meet world-leading targets of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 42 per cent by 2020 and by 80 per cent by 2050. We are more than halfway towards meeting our 2020 target of a 42 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and the Committee on Climate Change recently reported that good progress has been made in Scotland in reducing emissions across the economy, and more specifically in energy. That is good news, but we recognise that we have to do more. Tougher decisions and major transformational changes still lie ahead, and everybody will need to be on board for Scotland's transition to a low-carbon society, to enable us to achieve those objectives.

To date, we have strongly endorsed the robust regulation of any techniques associated with unconventional oil and gas, and we are pleased that our environmental regulator, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, published guidance on shale gas and coal-bed methane in December 2012. The Scottish Government has consistently worked with the principal regulators to ensure that an appropriate and robust regulatory framework is in place. That is essential to protect our communities and environment, both now and for the future.

Alison Johnstone: Although it may be possible to prove that extraction is safe, it simply will not be possible to prove that burning the fuel that is extracted is safe. Does the cabinet secretary accept that there are more fossil fuels than we can burn?

John Swinney: The key point that I would make to Alison Johnstone is that all these issues must be considered within our framework to reduce climate change. I have just commented on the importance of realising our climate change targets, so any action that is taken on the development of energy resources must, in the first place, be compatible with the robust regulatory framework that we have put in place for the regulation of all these areas and, secondly, must also enable us to secure the necessary progress that is required on our climate change targets.

The Government continues to keep the regulatory framework under review. For example, we have recognised that there is a significant amount of scientific evidence available on unconventional and, to ensure that that information is assessed effectively, the Scottish Government has convened an independent expert scientific panel to review the evidence. Of course, that will be instrumental in informing any further decisions that the Government takes and it will have a bearing on Scottish planning policy, which is currently under review and will be the subject of

conclusions by the Minister for Local Government and Planning in due course, along with the national planning framework, which has attracted interest from parliamentary committees.

The Government has in place robust arrangements to ensure that these issues are dealt with effectively and satisfactorily and that we fulfil our obligations on emissions reduction under the world-leading climate change legislation that the Parliament passed.

I move amendment S4M-09927.3, to leave out from "the significant" to end and insert:

"that Scotland has a rich diversity of energy sources including a very successful oil and gas sector and growing expertise in renewables including wind, wave and tidal; welcomes Scotland's evidence-based approach to unconventional fossil fuels; supports the ongoing review of the scientific evidence by the expert scientific panel in relation to unconventional fossil fuels and looks forward to its report; welcomes the Scottish Government's announcement of a strengthening of Scottish planning policy, coming into force in June 2014, in relation to unconventional fossil fuel extraction as an indication that the concerns of environmental campaigners and local communities are taken seriously; further welcomes the recent UK Committee on Climate Change report that praised Scottish progress in decarbonising its energy sector; notes that almost half of Scotland's electricity is now delivered from renewables, and further notes that Scotland has the world's leading climate change legislation and the largest carbon emission reductions in western Europe."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

I advise members that there is no extra time available this afternoon, so interventions should be contained within speeches.

15:28

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I start by congratulating Alison Johnstone on bringing the debate to the chamber, because it is an important and current policy issue that, until now, we have largely debated only in committee. However, although we welcome the Greens' debate, we cannot support their motion.

First, it conflates coal-bed methane extraction and hydraulic fracturing, which are not the same thing, and it calls them new methods of extraction, although they are not. They both have a long history, and fracking is common offshore day by day.

Alison Johnstone: Is Iain Gray aware that, in areas where unconventional gas extraction occurs, coal-bed methane extraction leads to hydraulic fracturing in 40 per cent of cases?

Iain Gray: They are two different processes, as Ms Johnstone herself pointed out when she complained that one can move easily to the other in the regulatory framework.

Secondly, although the UK Government rates incentive in England seems a rather blunt instrument, we should be careful not to dismiss the idea of community benefit were onshore extraction ever to proceed. After all, we accept the idea that there should be community benefit from onshore wind and opencast coal mining, so perhaps we should not dismiss it out of hand in this case.

Primarily, though, we cannot support the motion's core proposal for an outright ban. Of course, as the Green motion says, we have to meet our targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and the Labour amendment makes that clear. However, we have to take the public with us, and that means being able to demonstrate how we will secure our energy supply as we transition to a balanced but decarbonised energy economy.

In a recent briefing in the Parliament, Professor Lunn of the University of Strathclyde demonstrated that, even if all the renewables targets to which Mr Swinney referred are met by 2020, there will still be a 13 gigawatt hour gap in energy production. Central to those figures is the loss of base-load generation and the fact that 40 per cent of energy consumption is currently gas-fired heating. Cockerzie is closed, Peterhead is two-thirds mothballed, and Longannet might be at the mercy of new European Union directives. The replacement of Torness and Hunterston is currently vetoed by ministers. Commercial carbon capture seems further away than we had hoped. It is not clear where our future base-load is coming from.

Meanwhile, investment in offshore wind projects is, at best, delayed, for whatever reason, and we have also seen significant withdrawals from marine power projects. We urgently need a hard-headed, realistic, and comprehensive plan for how we transition to a decarbonised energy market while protecting the security of energy supplies, including but not only electricity generation.

Having closed down the eminently sensible option of another generation of nuclear power, we are in no position to shut down another potential energy source, especially when we do not have the scientific evidence for what reserves are available. We should, however, proceed with great caution, hence our consistent support for stronger planning guidelines for shale gas extraction. Nor should we allow ourselves to be taken in by the idea that shale gas is a panacea that will cut energy costs. Alison Johnstone's motion is right about that, and that is one reason why we cannot support the Tory amendment this afternoon. Cutting energy bills needs reform of the market and action on excessive profits by the big six companies.

We should also not forget that shale gas is an industrial feedstock as well as an energy source. It is not so long since the Parliament supported a deal that kept the Ineos plant at Grangemouth open. That deal is exactly about using shale gas as raw material in a manufacturing enterprise that is of economic significance to this country. That fact was made very clear to us when we saw the impact that the temporary closure of Grangemouth had on gross domestic product figures for that quarter.

The Government's amendment founds on planning policy that we have not yet seen, and the Government refuses to face up to the fact that it continues to miss all its world-beating climate change targets. However, with regard to the crux of the debate, which is how to proceed, our position is similar to the Government's, so if by some curious and unexpected twist of parliamentary arithmetic, the Government's amendment survives and ours falls, we will support the amended motion in the final vote. However, we prefer our own amendment and will prefer it in the first instance tonight.

I move, as an amendment to motion S4M-09927, to leave out from "opposition" to end and insert

"concern in relation to fracking and calls on the Scottish Government to introduce robust national guidelines for all forms of unconventional gas extraction; agrees that unconventional gas extraction would not drive prices down for hard-pressed consumers, rendering a price freeze and reform of the energy market urgent; believes that renewable energy as a growing part of a diverse energy mix makes Scotland's energy supply more secure and provides new jobs and businesses in the renewable energy sector as well as helping Scotland hit its carbon reduction targets; supports new community ownership models to help Scotland meet its renewable energy targets, benefit local economies through the creation of green jobs and address the threat of fuel poverty, and believes that Scotland must develop an energy policy that balances its energy needs with its climate change and carbon reduction targets as it is essential that the Scottish Government meets its targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009."

15:33

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Scottish Greens for giving us the opportunity this afternoon to debate the extraction of unconventional gas throughout Scotland. I commend Alison Johnstone for at least being consistent on the issue, although she is consistently wrong. Like Iain Gray, I fear that she has misrepresented key aspects of the debate.

First, the motion refers to

"significant public opposition to new methods of fossil fuel extraction such as fracking and coal-bed methane".

Certainly there are those in the environmental movement who have been doing their best to whip

up such opposition, going round the country peddling their pseudoscience and their hysterical scare stories about earthquakes, exploding taps and all the rest.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: No, thank you.

When we actually look at public opinion, we see that not everyone is buying that nonsense. According the latest DECC public opinion tracker, published last week, more people support shale gas extraction than oppose it, and the numbers are growing.

Alison Johnstone: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: No, I need to make some progress.

We should remember that there is nothing new about fracking for shale gas and extracting coal seam gas in Scotland. Back in the 1960s in Lanarkshire, and as recently as the 1980s within the boundaries of the city of Glasgow, fracking has taken place. Also, fracking takes place at the moment in the North Sea with none of the apocalyptic side effects that some in the environmental movement have predicted.

There are four key advantages to exploiting our unconventional gas reserves. The first of those relates to security of supply. We have gone from being a nation that is a net exporter of gas to being an importer. As we develop more and more renewable sources of energy—particularly those, such as wind, that have an intermittent output—our reliance on gas will actually increase over the medium term.

The question then is not whether we will require gas—because it is beyond doubt that we will be increasingly reliant upon it in the coming decades—but where that gas will come from. Will it be produced domestically or will we import it? In future decades, I do not want us to rely on Mr Putin's Russia for our gas supplies. For that reason alone, it makes sense to develop a domestic source of gas to provide for our energy needs.

Secondly, there is the issue of the impact on energy bills. It is well known that, in the United States, the development of a shale gas industry has dramatically cut energy costs and led to the reindustrialisation of the US economy. Although no one reasonably predicts a similar impact here in the UK, increasing the domestic supply of gas is bound to have a beneficial impact on energy prices.

Thirdly, there is the issue of carbon emissions. The US has saved millions of tonnes in carbon by shifting from burning coal to burning gas. Gas is a

fossil fuel, but it is cleaner than coal. As we develop low-carbon alternatives, gas must be a better option, at least in the medium term.

Fourthly, there is the economic opportunity that is presented. There is the potential for tens of thousands of jobs to be created in a new industry—an industry that will be of real benefit to Scotland and which will complement the development of more renewables.

Iain Gray reminded us that, last year, there was consensus among all Scottish political parties that the Ineos plant in Grangemouth should be saved. I am delighted that it was saved. The Scottish and UK Governments worked together and hundreds of jobs in central Scotland were safeguarded. The Ineos plant depends on shale gas as its raw material. The gas is shipped in a fleet of Chinese-built tankers across the Atlantic from Pennsylvania. It is not surprising that Ineos is keen to see a domestic supply of shale gas as a feeder product. On every level, that must make sense.

I do not recall the Green Party, in the course of the past year, distancing itself from the political consensus around the Ineos plan or calling for it to be shut down. However, if the Green Party's opinion is to be consistent, that is what it should be doing. By opposing unconventional gas, it is opposing those many jobs in the Falkirk area.

I believe that unconventional gas presents a tremendous opportunity for Scotland, always provided that the appropriate environmental safeguards are put in place. I look forward to hearing the Scottish Government's proposals following its expert review panel. I struggle, though, to understand the lack of enthusiasm from the Scottish Government—a Government that falls over itself to promote the offshore oil and gas industry but seems strangely reluctant to support the same industry onshore.

Like Iain Gray, I have a lot of sympathy for the Government's amendment and, should the Conservatives' amendment fall, I would be prepared to support it.

Having recognised the opportunities presented, the UK Government is right to have introduced incentives for the exploitation of unconventional gas. I hope that the Scottish Government follows suit and sees this as a new industry that can be of great benefit to Scotland for future generations.

I move amendment S4M-09927.2, to leave out from "the significant" to end and insert:

"that the Department of Energy and Climate Change's public opinion tracker now shows that more people across the UK support the extraction of shale gas than oppose it; recognises the benefits for Scotland in exploiting unconventional gas reserves in terms of providing security of energy supply, creating jobs, reducing carbon emissions and potentially helping to reduce energy bills; believes that,

with appropriate environmental safeguards in place, this natural resource can be extracted safely and to the benefit of communities; welcomes the UK Government's support for the industry, and calls on the Scottish Government to show as much enthusiasm for onshore oil and gas as it currently demonstrates for offshore.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. We are very tight for time, with speeches of a maximum of four minutes.

15:38

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): As it says in the Scottish National Party amendment,

"Scotland has a rich diversity of energy sources including a very successful oil and gas sector and growing expertise in renewables including wind, wave and tidal".

SNP thinking on energy goes back decades to the early days of oil and gas extraction in the 1970s and 1980s. We viewed North Sea oil wealth as a source of investment in the industries of the future, including energy conservation and alternative energy. The late Stephen Maxwell reminded us of that in his book "Arguing for Independence", which was published in 2012. Stephen went on to point out that Scotland and Norway are similarly blessed or cursed, depending on one's outlook. Both have huge hydrocarbon deposits and both have huge renewables potential.

From the early days of North Sea oil extraction, the SNP talked about slower extraction and legacy potential. The Norwegians practised that while we could only look with envy during the long Thatcher years and Blair's continuation of that extractive mentality. All that time, Norway insisted on a big stake for Statoil to balance what was called the greed of the seven sisters of big oil. Norway also insisted on a slower rate of extraction, with tighter environmental and safety laws. The recent helicopter accident rate in the UK sector contrasts sharply with that in the Norwegian sector.

In those pre-devolution days—when the Green Party was only being founded—the SNP was already thinking about what independence could bring for energy policy. Fast forward to Scotland today, and the agreement between our two parties that independence is essential is a given. It is increasingly possible to decarbonise our energy needs and to manage our wealth for a fairer Scandinavian style of social democracy that is light years from the attitude of successive UK Governments.

Jason Anderson, the head of climate and energy policy in the World Wide Fund for Nature's European policy office, has hailed Scotland as a

"forward thinking nation"

that is

"in the vanguard of the renewables revolution"

and has the most ambitious climate change laws.

The SNP proposes a list of green gains from independence, which Richard Lochhead set out last week. Therefore, this debate on a wish to decarbonise our energy sources should have that trajectory in full focus. The Green Party should not ignore the fact that hydrocarbon development and Aberdeen's worldwide success story have given us a huge skills base. It is up to us to channel that expertise towards the full range of renewables development in the service not only of Scotland but, through interconnectors, of our neighbours across Europe, and of the planet as we tackle the scourge of climate change.

We can enshrine environmental protection in a written constitution. We can go past our leading renewables production record of nearly 50 per cent of electricity output and ensure that we reach 100 per cent by 2020, with an unswerving focus on delivery of onshore and offshore clean power, through the certain knowledge that a Scottish Government that is in charge of all of our policies will ensure that business investment has security.

UK Governments have had an extractive mentality from the 1970s to this day: let us recall the dash for gas, their nuclear obsession and their total lack of legacy planning that could turn the one-off oil wealth into the fund for future generations that our people need.

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

Rob Gibson: A recent poll for DECC showed that 50 per cent of Tories would rather live near a wind farm than have fracking in their back yard. Many more people across Scotland want the same.

15:43

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): As stated in Labour's amendment, Scotland needs a robust and balanced energy policy that strives to match our energy needs with our climate change and carbon reduction targets.

I do not agree with the Green Party's motion that unconventional gas extraction should be banned outright; nor do I agree with the approach that has been taken by the Westminster Government, which seems to have embraced shale gas with open arms and has, at times, flouted proper regulation in the rush to do so. Currently, the scale of the impacts of fracking on health, the climate and the local environment is unknown, and it would be foolhardy to welcome the industry until we better understand the implications.

With that in mind, our approach to fracking should be cautious and based on scientific evidence. It is an industry that could be damaging to our climate change targets, so I am calling on the Scottish Government to bring forward robust national guidelines for all forms of unconventional gas extraction before the industry is allowed to continue in Scotland.

I see no reason to rush into fracking. An expansion of the shale gas industry is unlikely to assist in our attempts to meet carbon reduction targets, create jobs or bring down energy costs to assist the estimated 900,000 people who currently suffer from fuel poverty.

It could be argued that shale gas extraction has driven down the cost of energy in the US, but the same is unlikely to occur here. A report that was carried out by the US Energy Information Administration said:

"Compared with North America, the shale geology of the UK is considerably more complex, while drilling and completion costs for shale wells are substantially higher."

Friends of the Earth also points to the fact that the industry is unlikely to create significant jobs growth within Scotland, with Dart Energy's Airth project likely to create only 20 jobs.

Fracking might well increase our energy security, but a better way to do that would be to promote a diverse energy supply, including a strong renewables sector, with a drive towards community ownership. That would also help achieve our climate change and carbon reduction targets.

However, the renewables sector in Scotland could be under threat from separation. Scotland currently receives around a third of all renewables subsidies in the UK despite representing only 10 per cent of the consumer base. If we were to separate, that cost would fall to Scottish consumers, inevitably putting up energy costs and forcing even more people into fuel poverty.

Scottish Labour has always advocated community ownership as a vehicle for empowering local communities, tackling social justice and delivering economic growth. Community ownership in renewables would not only help Scotland to achieve renewables targets but create green jobs while tackling fuel poverty.

There is no reason to rush into fracking in Scotland. It seems to provide limited gain at this stage against the possibility of a disaster for the environment, our health and our climate change targets. Fracking should be halted until robust national guidelines, including planning guidelines, are in place to ensure that it is in line with our Scottish energy policy. Instead, we should aim to secure an affordable, diverse energy supply that, above all, tackles the scourge of fuel poverty.

15:46

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government's precautionary approach to hydraulic fracturing and unconventional gas extraction and, therefore, I have some sympathy—but only some—with Alison Johnstone's motion.

I am proud of Scotland's world-leading climate change legislation because it strikes a sensible balance between the need to reduce our CO₂ emissions and the need to maintain our economy. That requires a long-term approach, and I am pleased that we are on course to hit our long-term targets.

Unfortunately, the Scottish Green Party focuses too much on short-term figures, denying the reality of the economic difficulties that may face us in any given year, denying the effect that poor economic performance would have on the poorest people in our society, denying the effects on jobs and unemployment that its policies would have and denying the increase in poverty that they would bring about.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Will Mike MacKenzie take an intervention?

Mike MacKenzie: No—I am sorry but I am short of time.

For instance, I was disappointed to hear Patrick Harvie dismiss in a recent debate the opportunity presented by carbon capture and storage, which offers opportunities not only to decarbonise our energy supply but to help many of our neighbouring countries to do so.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will Mike Mackenzie give way?

Mike MacKenzie: No, I am not taking interventions because I am short of time. [Interruption.] Sorry—another occasion, Mr Harvie.

In acquiring the expertise to develop world-leading renewables technologies, Scotland has the opportunity not just to reduce its own carbon emissions but to help the rest of the world to reduce emissions, too. If we are going to help to save the planet, we have to do so on the basis of good science, good sense and a reasonable and rational approach. That is why I am glad that the Scottish Government has set up an expert scientific panel to advise it on unconventional gas while it takes steps to strengthen planning and environmental protection.

It is also why I am dismayed at the effects of UK Government energy market reform and disappointed at the UK Government's delay in implementing the recommendations of the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets's project transmit, which offers at least a partial solution to

the disproportionate transmission charging regime. It is why I am disappointed at its failure to invest in upgrading the grid, not least providing interconnectors to Scotland's islands, which could generate 5 per cent of the UK's electricity requirement by 2030.

There is another way of achieving the end that Alison Johnstone and I both wish to see: meeting our climate change targets by advancing our significant renewable energy opportunity. That has the advantage of improving our economic performance and not diminishing it, of creating jobs and not destroying them, and of reducing energy prices over time and not increasing them. Unfortunately, the UK Government has been hindering that objective and not helping to meet it, which is why Alison Johnstone and I agree that we will make much more progress on that issue and many others after independence.

15:50

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To members of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, this is a very familiar topic, although we are used to seeing Murdo Fraser curb his great enthusiasm so as to retain convener-like composure. For his and everybody else's sake, I am glad that he had the chance to let loose today.

The UK Government's headlong rush to pepper rural England with unconventional gas sites is quite remarkable, not just because of the contrast with the more cautious and evidence-based approach of the Scottish Government but because it comes from a party that, in past manifestos, held local opposition to be so sacrosanct that it proposed a moratorium on onshore wind farms. Take the plans, roll on a few years and we can easily foresee a point at which the well-to-do villagers march instead against gas wells, and wind farm protests are last decade. We are not talking about the big sky country of the United States, where there is a hundred miles between homes and no communities in between—here, every drilling site has someone for a neighbour.

There might be communities that would welcome unconventional gas—doubtless, there are communities that would, on balance, welcome a large-scale return to opencast coal mining, despite all the environmental difficulties that it would cause. However, if such communities exist today with arms outstretched for shale gas, I do not see them. The updating of planning policy will strengthen the hand of communities, whatever their view, and it is to be enthusiastically welcomed.

For me, the motion is narrowly and perhaps a little excessively focused on one aspect of fossil fuel extraction when, in truth, the instinct of the

proposer is, I think, to object to it in all its aspects. We live in a nation that is committed to reductions in fossil fuel use and in a world that should be. For some, that is an inconvenient truth but, for us, it is a legislative reality.

Recently, I participated in a science festival event in which an audience member asked the panel what a Scottish energy mix in the 2020s would be. To the surprise of the questioner, all of us on the panel, including Dr David Toke, renewables expert and consultant for the European Greens, agreed on the need to use gas as a step-down fuel. As we have heard, per unit, gas releases less carbon than coal and even less with carbon capture and storage. Although Scotland will generate enough renewable electricity to meet our annual demand by 2020, gas is needed for the peaks and troughs, because it can be dialled up and down more flexibly than nuclear or any other competitor. In heating, gas will continue to be with us for some time to come.

Both of those issues have to be—and are being—taken into account in our world-leading emissions trajectory. Against that must be held the danger of drawing investment away from renewables, as nuclear has unquestionably done south of the border, as well as the carbon costs of extraction, which are higher the more unconventional the method, and the question of safety in an industry in which competing claims have left doubts that thus far have not reassured those who would see fracking next door.

There should be two lenses for considering unconventional gas. The first is that individuals should have the right to live in communities that are clean and safe and that are in control of their own future, which is a principle that I hold to whether the community is local, national or supranational. The second is the need for us as a society to reduce overall carbon emissions. Those should be the evidence tests not just for unconventional gas but for all energy sources, including renewables. Most people welcome our tremendous progress in that field, but we have to encourage projects in which communities are not just the neighbours but the principal initiators, owners and benefactors of the energy that is generated from their surroundings.

15:54

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to close the debate for the Scottish Conservatives.

A number of members have rightly referred, as does our amendment, to the importance of energy security, which I want to emphasise, not least in light of the political events that have involved Russia in the past few months.

We cannot ignore the fact that, 10 years ago, the UK was a net exporter of gas, whereas now we have to import billions of cubic tonnes of gas each year to meet demand. As Murdo Fraser pointed out, much of that comes from Pennsylvania to Grangemouth, which I am sure would like a more local supply.

The chief executive of Centrica, Sam Laidlaw, said recently:

"By 2020 we will be reliant on imports to meet 70 per cent of the country's gas needs. So when it comes to security of supply, there is a pressing need for solutions."

The Scottish Conservatives have consistently argued that our energy supply must come from as diverse a range of sources as possible, and that remains our position.

Last week, I was pleased to host a briefing in the Parliament on the excellent work that is being done on nuclear fusion research at the Culham centre for fusion energy. That is a potential energy source in the medium to long term that could be transformational.

Given our view that energy should come from a broad range of sources, we believe that it would simply not be responsible or sensible to ignore the potential of shale gas extraction and coal-bed methane. Rather, we should seek to exploit our unconventional gas reserves, as other nations have done with much success, in a sensible manner that ensures that the appropriate environmental safeguards are in place.

A number of the concerns about unconventional gas extraction are based on worries about risks that are similar to those that are associated with conventional coal mining and oil and gas exploration, which are covered by regulations in those sectors. I understand that, because of the more intense nature of shale gas extraction, the process is associated with more negative impacts than conventional drilling, but issues that are associated with hydraulic fracking, such as water contamination risks, can be covered by regulation from SEPA and minimised by proper designs for the integrity of wells.

The UK Government has rightly shown support for the industry. The Scottish Government should seek to emulate the efforts of DECC's office of unconventional gas and oil in streamlining legislation in the area.

I am aware that the House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee's fifth report suggested that offshore shale gas might potentially dwarf onshore gas. Although it is currently not economically viable, I hope that the UK Government might at some stage in the future consider using tax breaks to incentivise that exploration. From the climate change angle, we should also recognise that burning shale gas in

the USA has displaced significant amounts of coal burning and resulted in a fall in CO₂ emissions of around 450 million tonnes in five years.

To conclude, we cannot support calls to ban unconventional gas extraction, as there is too much potential from those sources to help to boost our economy and increase the security of our future energy supply. We recognise that shale gas is still at an exploratory stage in the UK and that there are opportunities for coal-bed methane, which is known as coal seam gas in Australia, where advances have been made, especially in Queensland and New South Wales. We look to the Scottish Government to work as constructively with companies in that field as it does with those in the conventional oil and gas sector.

I support Murdo Fraser's amendment.

15:58

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Alison Johnstone for bringing the debate to the chamber. It is a very important one in the context of our energy security and where we are going in the future.

Scottish Labour has grave concerns about fuel poverty and the stark choices that too many people in Scotland face about whether to heat their homes or eat properly. This afternoon's debate on wealth and income inequality will give us a chance to further explore those areas, and Scottish Labour's argument for a way forward to a moral economy. There is evidence, however, as we have heard from other members, that even if coal-bed methane extraction was to proceed in Scotland, it would not bring down energy prices, because there would never be the critical mass that there has been in the States.

Friends of the Earth has argued that, rather than being plentiful, cheap and clean, unconventional gas in Scotland can only ever be "scarce, expensive and dirty". There has certainly been some controversy over whether its exploitation will have an impact on energy prices. Among others, Deutsche Bank remains sceptical about the economic impact of unconventional gas extraction here. As our amendment states, it

"would not drive"

energy

"prices down for hard-pressed consumers, rendering a price freeze and reform of the energy market urgent".

It has been valuable to have briefings from WWF Scotland, Friends of the Earth Scotland and RSPB Scotland for today's debate. There is much research evidence from other countries about environmental and health concerns. Some of it is conflicting, but there are certainly causes for concern. The scientific evidence from the on-going

work of the expert panel will be watched carefully and will be scrutinised by many beyond the Scottish Government.

This is a time of difficult uncertainty for communities that might be affected, although there are currently no applications for fracking. Scottish Labour has consistently called for the Scottish Government to introduce robust guidelines, and it has been acknowledged today that that will happen. It is also essential that the strategic environmental impact assessment process being called for by Friends of the Earth Scotland is put in place.

During the 1990s, I was a community activist on guidelines for opencast mining; we managed to get better distances between communities and excavation. I am keenly aware of the importance of ensuring that guidelines are right from the start, before any application is considered. My colleague Claire Baker and I have questioned ministers about the Scottish Government's policy on distances and I particularly want to explore the relationship between operations and residential and water-protected areas. The Minister for Local Government and Planning has assured me in a written answer that the issue will be part of the Scottish planning policy published in June. I hope that the minimum distances that need to be respected will be included in robust guidelines.

We should surely be adopting the precautionary principle for a range of reasons. As the Parliament has heard on many occasions, Scotland has world-leading climate change legislation, but it is vital that that is matched by action. Although unconventional gas could be used as a transition fuel, there are still many question marks over the process.

As stated in our amendment, we in the Scottish Labour Party support renewables and energy efficiency going hand in hand. The pathway to community renewables is often a rocky one. Coincidentally, tonight I will host a massive open online course—MOOC—workshop to support communities to take the issue forward. The cabinet secretary argued for transformational change. In that shift, let us be sure that Scotland gets it right and is fair to our communities and for our future.

16:02

John Swinney: This has been a good debate. There has not been agreement, because there are clearly legitimate policy differences among members, but members have expressed their views with courtesy and respect—perhaps with the exception of Mr Fraser's bombast. Perhaps it allows him to relieve himself of the burdens of

convenership; we all quite understand that these things have to happen every so often.

There has been an honest exchange on a range of points of view. The Green Party made it pretty clear that it does not support any of the forms of onshore oil and gas development that have been talked about. The Conservatives encouraged such development, although not quite everywhere. It was a more enthusiastic response, though, and I thought that Mr McGrigor was somewhat more measured in his summing up than Mr Fraser was in his opening speech. The Labour Party called for the Government to publish more guidance.

More guidance is on its way in the Scottish planning policy, but I reiterate what I said earlier: the country's environmental regulator, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, published its guidance on shale gas and coal-bed methane in December 2012. For the benefit of Margaret McDougall, it is important to reiterate that that guidance has been put in place.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the more cautious approach of the Scottish Government to unconventional and I also welcome the fact that the planning policy is being tightened up. However, the planning policy does not apply retrospectively to my constituents in Canonbie in Dumfries and Galloway and concerns have been raised about links between some members of the expert panel and the industry. What reassurances can the cabinet secretary give to my constituents on both those matters?

John Swinney: The expert panel has been selected on the basis of the scientific expertise that the individuals have to offer and the Government will consider carefully the material that is forthcoming.

In addition—this also relates to the point that Joan McAlpine has just raised with me about planning policy—I note that, in the draft Scottish planning policy in relation to unconventional oil and gas development, the Government introduced buffer zones between potential developments and communities, clearly indicating its determination to listen to communities' views and ensure that environmental protection is put in place. That merited the following response from the head of campaigns at Friends of the Earth Scotland:

"it is a firm step in the right direction ... We welcome the Government's recognition that buffer zones are necessary".

The director of WWF Scotland said:

"We welcome this commitment".

There is a pretty broad endorsement of the direction that the Government is taking in an evidence-based and clearly evidence-led process to determine the contents of our policy framework,

which will of course come back to the Parliament for consideration in due course.

Marco Biagi raised the issue of community involvement in many aspects of renewable energy development and I agree entirely with the aspirations that he set out. Local benefits must be at the heart of our vision for renewable energy in Scotland. We put that issue centre stage in the development with the objective of achieving a target of at least 500MW of community and locally owned renewables by 2020 to provide a clear structure to the realisation of community benefit arising from renewable energy.

The Government has set out a clear and measured approach to the handling of a sensitive set of issues and I reassure the Parliament that we will act on the basis of clear guidance and a considered assessment of all the evidence, with our environmental regulators acting, as they always do, clearly and implicitly in the interests of the people of Scotland and the protection of the important natural environment that surrounds us all. Those considerations will be at the heart of all the steps that the Government takes to advance the issues as we bring forward the Scottish planning policy and consider other contributions that we will make to the debate and assess all the relevant issues and the issues that are important to the people of Scotland.

16:07

Alison Johnstone: Fracking and other forms of extreme energy, such as coal-bed methane and underground coal gasification, have dominated the public debates on energy over the past year. Caroline Lucas, the green MP for Brighton Pavilion, was arrested for taking part in a day of action against fracking at Balcombe in West Sussex—she was subsequently acquitted.

I thank members for their contributions this afternoon. The cabinet secretary made it clear that the Government is taking an evidence-based approach and that planning policy will be strengthened by including a buffer zone to protect local communities. However, as I suggested earlier, although we can make it as safe as possible to extract these gases, it will simply not be possible to make it safe to burn them. Nevertheless, I welcome the fact that the Government is giving the issue serious consideration.

I reassure Iain Gray, who either mistakenly or mischievously suggested that we were conflating different types of unconventional gas extraction, that we are not conflating hydraulic fracturing with coal-bed methane. He went on to conflate nuclear power with clean energy.

Iain Gray: Will the member give way?

Alison Johnstone: No. I would like to make some progress.

Iain Gray: That was an accusation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Alison Johnstone: Murdo Fraser suggested that those who express concerns about some of the health impacts are merely engaging in “pseudoscience”. I politely suggest that the “greenest Government ever” is merely pseudo-politicking. This week, in a confirmed case from just two weeks ago, a fracking company in Texas was ordered to pay \$3 million in compensation to a family who suffered chronic nosebleeds, irregular heartbeats, muscle spasms and even open sores as a result of the drilling chemicals. That is not pseudoscience. This is an area that we should consider with great concern.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way?

Alison Johnstone: No, I want to make progress.

I agree entirely with what Rob Gibson said about using Scotland’s skilled energy workers. There are many opportunities in the renewables industry. The sector currently provides about 11,000 jobs and I will work with anyone who wants the number to increase.

Margaret McDougall advocated community ownership. It is highly unlikely that unconventional gas will lend itself to such a model.

Mike MacKenzie accused the Greens of short-termism. I found that astonishing. It is short-termism that encourages people to think that extracting unconventional gas is any sort of answer to the climate and energy challenges that we face. It is long-termism to think about investing to insulate every home in Scotland. If we properly skilled up our builders and workmen so that they could treat all the hard-to-treat homes in tenements and buildings in this country, we would create another jobs revolution.

Just so that Iain Gray is aware that I understand the difference between fracking and coal-bed methane extraction, let me say that fracking involves pumping millions of tonnes of water down a well under high pressure, whereas coal-bed methane extraction involves pumping a massive quantity of water out of coal-beds, to lower the pressure and extract gas over a large area. There are inevitably escapes into the atmosphere, and it is important that we consider fugitive emissions. Methane is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, especially given the 20-year timescale in which we must tackle climate change.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Could we not—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Johnstone, will you speak into your microphone, please? [*Interruption.*] Mr Johnstone, have you put your card in your console?

Alex Johnstone: Sorry, Presiding Officer. I was just going to say that the synergy of the two operations is such that they could take place side by side. Can we take the water that we bring up from one well and pump it down the other?

Alison Johnstone: I thank Mr Johnstone for that intervention.

The first couple of studies that measure, rather than estimate, methane emissions at unconventional gas sites in the United States are damning. They report data of an order of magnitude greater than the US Government's estimates. If the findings are replicated, they mean that unconventional gas is significantly more damaging than it has been estimated to be and its usefulness as a lower-carbon bridging fuel is under severe threat.

The vast quantities of contaminated water that need to be treated and the large number of wells that will be needed if the development at Airth proceeds all risk contamination. Toxic BTEX chemicals—benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes—all naturally occur in coal-beds and are harmful to human health if they get into the soil or our water courses. In its briefing for this debate, Friends of the Earth Scotland describes numerous pollution incidents.

Jamie McGrigor mentioned energy security, which was a theme in the debate. We import gas, which costs money and, of course, the profits go elsewhere. By far the largest chunk comes from Norway, the Netherlands and Belgian pipelines. We also import liquefied natural gas from Qatar and elsewhere.

Real energy security comes from reducing and indeed ending our dependence on gas. Whereas significant unconventional gas will not come on stream for a decade, the renewables industry in Scotland is well past the fledgling stage. The planned offshore turbines will bolster our power sector before unconventional gas does. The 20 or so jobs that are on offer at Dart Energy's site in Airth do not compare with the 11,000 jobs of the people who work in Scotland's renewables sector, which many members mentioned.

As I said, when it comes to community benefits, renewables win hands down. The model is adaptable and lends itself to community involvement and ownership in a way that nuclear power and unconventional gas simply cannot or will not do.

As well as supporting the renewables sector, we must acknowledge that the cheapest power station

is the one that we do not have to build. A transformation in energy efficiency for our homes and businesses is waiting to take place—if we would only invest in energy efficiency. About 40 per cent of our gas is used in domestic properties for heating and cooking, so there is much more that we could do if we would only give proper time and consideration to energy efficiency. I do not know whether people think that energy efficiency is a dull topic or whether they feel that they have debated it once too often but, as far as I am concerned, we cannot debate the topic enough.

Bringing Scotland's leaky homes up to good quality and rolling out district heating schemes will lower fuel costs. That is how we lower our reliance on gas. There are many other opportunities, too, whether we look at waste from anaerobic digesters or other emerging technologies. We do not have to rely on unconventional gas to fuel or to power Scotland. As the Airth development proposal rolls forward, I hope that the Government will give it due consideration, realise that it is entirely incompatible with the Government's climate change targets and turn it and any future proposal down.

Wealth and Income Inequality

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09926, in the name of Patrick Harvie.

16:16

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Green politics begins with a recognition that the ecological and social crises that we face both stem from the same broken economic system, so the Green Party's choice of topics for debate seek to reflect that balance.

We propose a motion on wealth and pay inequality at a time of increasing global debate about the subject. Over recent years, those debates have been informed by "The Spirit Level", which was written by Wilkinson and Pickett; by the work of the First Minister's favourite Nobel laureate, Joseph Stiglitz; and by the more recent work of Thomas Piketty.

In Scotland, the work of organisations such as Oxfam, the Carnegie UK Trust, the Jimmy Reid Foundation and the Scottish Trades Union Congress has also helped to develop the idea of an economy in which not just how much economic growth is generated but how fairly that is shared is measured. Just this week, we have seen work from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, as well as research published by the *Sunday Herald* at the weekend, that further the debate in the Scottish context.

It is going to be difficult to have the debate without the referendum context creeping in. Members on both sides of the referendum debate will have their own views: some will say that the Scottish Government can and must do more now, whereas others will say that we need the full powers of independence. The motion deliberately does not seek to get into that. Members on all sides know the Green position and why I will be voting yes, but in this debate our purpose is to seek agreement on the objective goal of reducing inequality in wealth and income so that, no matter which decision the Scottish people make, none of us can walk away from that agreement.

Neither the Labour amendment nor the Scottish National Party amendment seeks to remove most of the commitments in the motion on progressive and redistributive taxation, on decent wages instead of subsidised poverty pay and on the need to address high pay as well as low pay. I am glad that neither of the two large parties is seeking to remove those commitments.

The debate on inequality very often focuses on safety-net policies, such as benefits and the

minimum and living wages. Let us recognise that safety nets can all too easily develop holes. The creation of a legal minimum wage was a really important step; the advancement of a living wage is a better one. However, employers will find ways to exploit people by using tactics such as zero-hours contracts or the outsourcing of low-wage work to other companies to allow them to claim the public credit for paying the living wage to their direct employees while exploiting the labour of people in poverty. Even this Parliament has been in that position, despite the political will of the majority of its members.

The welfare system is supposed to be another safety net, but it is time to recognise just what the UK's welfare state has become. It not only allows poverty to continue but takes people who are already living with the stress of that poverty and heaps further stress on them. The system can be demeaning, humiliating and patronising, and all too often it seems to have been designed that way.

That attitude goes deeper than specific measures such as the vicious bedroom tax that we have already discussed this afternoon—it is also about values. For years now, divisive rhetoric such as "benefit cheats", "scroungers v strivers" and that old favourite "hard-working families" has been used by political and media voices alike to undermine the human empathy that a welfare state depends on and to present the false notion that there are those who contribute and those who only take. The reality is that every single one of us depends on a successful welfare state and, apart from the hoarders and tax dodgers among the super-rich, we all contribute as well. As a result, this debate is not just about whether the welfare system is run by an independent Scotland, a devolved Scottish Government or the United Kingdom Government, but about the urgent need to win again, from first principles, the argument for a welfare state and a society in which we are looked after and in which everyone's dignity matters.

We need more than just a safety-net agenda; after all, we cannot close the gap between rich and poor without addressing both sides of it—high pay as well as low pay. That said, pay levels matter not just at the top and the bottom but across the whole population. We remain, by European Union standards, a very low-wage economy, with half of working Scots earning less than £21,000 a year, and progressive taxation has to be part of the picture in relation to income and wealth taxes.

We also need to examine the structure of the economy. Especially in the period of low growth that many expect over the coming years and perhaps decades, the risk is that wages stagnate

while investment by the richest continues to pay back for them. If that happens, wealth will continue to accumulate in the hands of those who are already the wealthiest and we will never achieve the fairer, more equal, healthier and happier society that we should be seeking. Moreover, if we do not close the gap between rich and poor, we will not achieve the political consent needed for a welfare system that deserves the name—in other words, one that is focused on human welfare instead of one that bullies people into low-wage work.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Does the member not acknowledge that the spend on welfare is almost £200 billion out of a budget of about £670 billion, and that it accounts for far more expenditure than anything else we spend money on?

Patrick Harvie: I think that it is far more important than more or less anything else we spend money on to ensure that human dignity is protected and that all people are able to live with dignity.

I welcome the Labour amendment, because I want the Scottish Government to be bullish on the question of how procurement law can be used to address the living wage and a host of other issues, and to be willing, if necessary, to test the boundaries of European Union law. It has rightly shown that bullishness about alcohol pricing, and it should show the same on this issue.

I was not really surprised that the Conservatives lodged an amendment that I did not agree with very much, but let me pick apart a few aspects of it. It refers, for example, to “making work pay”. That prompts the question of whose work we are actually talking about and how much it should pay. We should remember that the Tory-led UK Government actually opposed the cap on bankers’ bonuses at the EU level. The idea that poor people must be made to work harder by paying them less and rich people must be made to work harder by paying them more still seems to hold sway in the UK Government.

Furthermore, what about those who cannot work because of disability, because work is not available or because work of a decent sort does not fit in with other commitments such as caring for children or relatives? It all comes back to that divisive rhetoric about “hard-working families”. We should be committed to building an economy that provides for every single one of us to live with dignity.

The Tory amendment also mentions the changes to tax allowances. Let us be clear: those changes have been regressive. The greatest percentage net change in household incomes has gone to the wealthiest, while 3 million of the

poorest households have gained nothing. Gavin Brown and I—and indeed all members in the chamber—are on very high incomes, and we are paying less tax as a result of that policy. In fact, David Cameron has even bragged that people on incomes as high as £100,000 a year are paying less.

In his amendment, Gavin Brown also refers to the increase to minimum wage levels. I wish that minimum wage levels had been increased to as much as the living wage. Let us recognise that £6.50, which is what the minimum wage for over-20s is being increased to, is more than £1 an hour below the living wage. Furthermore, the minimum wage for 18 to 20-year-olds is £5.13; for 16 and 17-year-olds, it is £3.79; and for apprentices, it is a meagre £2.73. Let us recognise that the increase is pretty paltry.

I will not support the Government amendment, partly because it deletes our proposal merely “to investigate” the idea of wage ratios.

There is more that we can do now to tackle wealth and income inequality in the devolved context. It is arguable that we can only do so properly with powers over tax and benefits. I have made it clear that this debate remains relevant whatever the outcome of the referendum. It is the wider question—the question of political direction, not just constitutional choices—that we seek to raise today.

Underneath all of that is a question of values. I have a degree of optimism that the obsession with superwealth is giving way to a wider cultural acceptance that sustainable quality of life should be the aspiration for individuals in a modern society. Whatever we can do to promote and push forward that transition to a society that does not fetishise vast wealth, we should do. I hope that the motion helps to do that.

I move,

That the Parliament is deeply concerned at the current and predicted level of wealth and income inequality and identifies tackling this inequality as key to creating a fair and successful society; understands that achieving greater equality will require closing the gap between the highest and lowest incomes, as well as progressive and redistributive wealth and income taxes; believes that everyone deserves a fair and decent wage for work that provides for them to live with dignity and that employers should not rely on the benefit system to subsidise poverty pay; condemns examples of unfair and excessive pay, such as the attempt by the Royal Bank of Scotland to pay bonuses worth 200% of salaries to its executives; welcomes the EU cap on bonuses, first proposed by the Greens-European Free Alliance group in the European Parliament, which came into force in 2014, and calls on the Scottish Government to investigate the option of establishing maximum wage ratios that would limit the difference between the lowest and highest pay.

16:26

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): There is not a lot in what Patrick Harvie has said that I would disagree with. All of us in the Parliament are concerned about the growing gap between the rich and the poor. It is certainly something that very much concerns the Scottish Government. That is why our economic strategy and national performance framework include cohesion and solidarity targets, which are designed to increase equality and reduce the disparities between different sections of our society.

There is no doubt that Scotland is a prosperous nation, rich in natural and human resources, yet far too many people and communities are still trapped in poverty and are prevented from realising their full potential. I find it utterly depressing that our first detailed analysis of UK Government data on wealth and assets in Scotland, which was published today, shows that 30 per cent of all households in Scotland have almost no wealth, meaning that they do not own property, they do not have a private pension or savings and they do not own items such as cars and household goods. That report also shows that those households simply do not have the income that is needed to gain the wealth and security that so many of us take for granted.

Based on current evidence and past performance, I do not believe that the UK Government will take the actions that are necessary to break the cycle of deprivation. Over the years, the Westminster system has failed to properly address the deep social inequalities that exist in Scottish society, with generation after generation feeling the impact.

I believe that Scotland needs to have full control of all economic levers in order to tackle and reverse those inequalities. Only independence would give the Scottish Parliament the powers that it needs to pursue a fairer economic model.

Gavin Brown: Income tax is clearly important in all of this. What changes would the minister's Government make to income tax were we to become independent?

Margaret Burgess: There has been lots of evidence about that. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that one way to define a tax system is to base it on principle. The best way for a new state to start out is to have a fairer system. The UK tax system has 10,000 pages of rules and regulations and more than 1,000 exemptions. We would create a system that was fairer and that allowed us to sustain public services and encourage economic growth.

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

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Will the minister take an intervention?

Margaret Burgess: I give way to John Finnie.

John Finnie: We all have a lot in common on this subject. To what extent does the minister believe that cutting corporation tax and giving breaks to firms such as Amazon and Starbucks will help to reduce inequality?

Margaret Burgess: That will help because it will make us competitive and get more than 27,000 additional jobs into Scotland, and because we support the living wage and have a living wage policy. We will also ensure that corporations pay their taxes. Another thing that we will do in an independent Scotland is tackle tax avoidance and come down heavy on companies that do not pay tax. That is another approach in a new system.

In the meantime, we are doing what we can within the limited powers that we have to tackle the huge inequality. Members should make no mistake that we accept that there is huge inequality. What we are doing includes the actions that are set out in our child poverty strategy to maximise household incomes, improve children's wellbeing and life chances and ensure that every one of us can live in a sustainable home and community.

It is simply unacceptable that, in a wealthy nation such as ours, a third of our children are not getting the start in life that they deserve. That is particularly unacceptable when the latest analysis shows that, if Scotland were an independent country, we would be the 14th wealthiest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

While the UK Government's austerity programme is placing households under increasing financial pressure—we all know that they are under such pressure—we are defending and extending certain core services, rights and benefits through the social wage. We are providing free personal care for the elderly; abolishing tuition fees; ending bridge tolls; abolishing prescription charges; providing free eye examinations; freezing council tax; providing concessionary bus travel; increasing the provision of free nursery education; and introducing free school meals for primary 1 to 3 children from January 2015.

The Scottish Government takes low pay seriously.

Drew Smith: Will the minister give way?

Margaret Burgess: I am sorry; I have taken two interventions already.

We have introduced the living wage across the public services that we are directly responsible for. We are encouraging the use of the living wage

throughout the public sector. We have taken direct action to raise minimum rates of pay in the parts of the public sector that are under our responsibility, with a minimum pay uplift of £300 a year for those who earn less than £21,000. We are also funding a Poverty Alliance pilot to encourage private employers to become accredited as living wage employers.

The measures that the Scottish Government is taking go far beyond any that the UK Government is putting in place for the lower paid.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Not from a Labour Government.

Margaret Burgess: We do not have a Labour Government and, given how Labour is behaving, we are unlikely to get one.

In addition, the Deputy First Minister has announced proposed stage 3 amendments to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, which Patrick Harvie mentioned, to make it explicit that the guidance about bidder selection will address remuneration and payment of the living wage.

Members should make no mistake that the Scottish Government is committed to supporting and promoting the Scottish living wage. Local authorities and contractors are well aware of what is expected of them as regards the living wage. We are doing everything that we can and we are still negotiating with the EU on whether we can do anything further in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill.

We have made it clear that we support the living wage. We have shown that by our action, by what we have done across the Scottish Government and in the public services and by the funding that we have given the Poverty Alliance. However, every effort that we have made has been hindered by the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms.

Drew Smith: Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in her last 20 seconds.

Margaret Burgess: It is clear—Patrick Harvie is right—that the welfare system is broken and cannot work for Scotland.

I hear that I am in my last 20 minutes—*[Interruption.]* I mean 20 seconds. Sorry—I thought that I had another 20 minutes, Presiding Officer. *[Laughter.]*

We will address poverty and inequality properly only when the Parliament has full control over all its resources, which include taxation and benefits. When that happens, we will be able to properly address wealth inequality in Scotland.

I move amendment S4M-09926.3, to leave out from "calls" to end and insert:

"recognises that it is only when the Parliament has full control over taxation and benefits that Scotland will be able to address wealth and income inequality properly".

16:34

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate wealth and income inequality and I thank Patrick Harvie for bringing the subject to the chamber. I welcome very much the approach that he has taken. Labour will support the motion at decision time because he has made the debate about political will and doing what is right and not about constitutional change. I respect him for doing that.

I share the aspiration that is expressed in the motion for

"a fair and successful society".

I recognise that, to achieve that, we need progressive policies that make work pay and seek to redistribute wealth.

The Labour Party was founded on the principle of sharing wealth to create a more equal society, and that is very much at the heart of all that we do. We are putting in place bold policies to tackle inequality. We have proposals for a progressive system of taxation that would enable those with the broadest shoulders to bear the biggest burden. We propose a freeze on energy prices, as we recognise that struggling families should not have to choose between heating and eating. We also support the introduction of a living wage because we need to make work pay. None of those progressive policies is supported by the Tories—as we would expect—or by the SNP.

We know that costs are rising and wages are declining. A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on minimum income standards tells us that the price of a basket of essential goods has risen by a staggering 25 per cent in the space of five years. Increasingly, people who are in work, as well as those who are out of work, are not making ends meet. I am told that many of the people who are now appearing at food banks are not unemployed but are in low-paid jobs and are struggling to cope before their wages come in.

The SNP's only answer—as evidenced by the minister's speech today—irrespective of the question that it is asked, is that independence will cure all ills. It is genuinely disappointing that the minister is not prepared to do anything, but one could say that that is consistent as well as totally lacking in ambition for people in communities throughout Scotland. Like the First Minister, she does not want a Labour Government. At the most recent election, the First Minister suggested that

people vote Liberal instead—I am sure that Willie Rennie was grateful for that. What is it about the SNP that means that it does not want to see positive change, not just in Scotland but across the United Kingdom?

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: No. We have heard enough from the SNP.

There is no guarantee that changing the constitution would deliver the progressive change that would ensure a fairer society. It would take political will to do that. There is nothing progressive about the SNP's proposals. It is the party that wants to cut corporation tax by 3 per cent more than even George Osborne wants to cut it, that refuses to commit to a 50 per cent top rate of income tax and that seems much more interested in protecting big businesses, bankers and the most wealthy. When the SNP has the opportunity to help some of the lowest-paid in society, it is found wanting.

Next week, we will debate the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 3. The bill sets out important principles for how we spend £10 billion in public contracts each year. Here is an opportunity to do something about the living wage and zero-hours contracts. Here is an opportunity to improve the income of 400,000 low-paid workers, 64 per cent of whom are women. However, so far, the SNP has set its face against improving the lot of the low paid. The SNP is good at talking but less good when it comes to taking action.

I will give way to the minister if she will tell us now whether the Government will amend the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 3 to include the living wage.

Margaret Burgess: Jackie Baillie is well aware that we are doing everything that we legally can and that we, as a Government, support the living wage.

Jackie Baillie: That did not sound like a “yes” to me. The SNP is again setting its face against that policy.

The minister's amendment removes the final sentence of the Greens' motion, which is a rather gentle request for the Government to investigate wage ratios. I admit to being surprised by that because, when Ken Macintosh brought the matter up at stage 2 of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, Nicola Sturgeon said:

“I whole-heartedly endorse many of—if not all—his comments.”—[*Official Report, Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee*, 12 March 2014; c 2772.]

That was the SNP position a mere few weeks ago. Why has it changed? Why is that proposal to be removed from the motion?

Low wages are not good for individuals, for society or for the economy. We are caught between two Governments with the wrong priorities. The Tories are not progressive and the SNP pretends to be but offers nothing to change the lives of the people of Scotland.

I move amendment S4M-09926.1, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges that over 400,000 people in Scotland are working for less than the living wage and that nearly two thirds of these are women; notes that payment of the living wage would boost the earnings of a full-time minimum wage worker by over £2,600 a year, and calls for the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill to be amended to extend the payment of the living wage to public contracts.”

16:39

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): It will have come as no surprise to the Green Party that we are not going to support its motion and that our amendment is of a completely different flavour. We do not agree with the thrust of what Patrick Harvie has said or with what he is attempting to do.

Nevertheless, I will say this for the Green Party: it is very clear about what it wants to achieve, and it is equally clear about how it would achieve it. It would introduce a completely different tax system and there would be a large increase in most taxes to pay for its proposals. In that sense, the Green Party's position stacks up; we simply disagree with it for political reasons.

I take issue with Patrick Harvie's categorisation of the welfare system in the UK as being designed to bully and demean. Although he did not use the same words, he repeated in spirit what the Scottish Government has said, which is that the welfare system is being dismantled by the coalition Government. Patrick Harvie did not specifically say that, but I believe that he alluded to it.

Patrick Harvie: I am saying it now.

Gavin Brown: Patrick Harvie must, as must everyone in the chamber, accept the basic facts about what is spent on the welfare system in the UK. I put the statistics to him: it is almost £200 billion out of about £670 billion. It is important to note that it is the largest single item of expenditure by the UK Government.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Can Gavin Brown clarify what is spent on pensions?

Gavin Brown: As Annabelle Ewing probably knows, something in the region of about 46 per cent of the £200 billion figure that I gave is related

to pensions, which leaves more than £100 billion for other welfare measures. That is still considerably more than just about any other department in the UK, and if other parties are unhappy with the expenditure on welfare, it is incumbent on them to suggest how they would pay for it, given that it has grown far more than any other department.

I name-checked Mr Harvie before, so I feel that I ought to give way to him again.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful to Mr Brown. I point out to him that the figure of £100 million that he has arrived at is not exactly eye-watering. It is what we would spend on about one mile of urban motorway in Scotland.

Gavin Brown: The figure is £100 billion. Mr Harvie must have misheard me. It is more than 50 per cent of the original £200 billion that I mentioned in my initial answer, so it is substantially more than the cost of one mile of motorway. Even the Green Party, which denounces motorways, will realise that the sum is substantially more than that.

We are disappointed with the Scottish Government's position, because it is suggesting that it would do things completely differently were we to be independent, but from what we have seen on paper we know that that is not true. The Scottish Government has no plans at all to change income tax. Mr Swinney has been at pains to reiterate that point, so the Scottish Government is making no changes to the tax system other than its pledge on corporation tax.

As we found out last week, most of welfare would remain the same. The largest changes that are being made to welfare programmes would remain. Not a single Scottish National Party member was able to contradict that last week. Where the SNP has had a choice and has had the levers and the powers, it has gone for universal benefits almost all the time. If changing inequality was the most important thing to the Scottish Government, it would not have gone for universal benefits on just about every policy measure that it has brought in. There was a large list of them from the minister, and all of them were universal—helping everybody as opposed to helping those whom the SNP claims to want to help.

I want to put on the record some of the conclusions of a report on inequality in Scotland by David Bell and David Eiser of the University of Stirling management school. It is worth noting some of comments that are made in their paper. They accept and point out that gross income inequality is relatively high in the UK, although wealth inequality is less so, but they also point out that most of the growth happened between 1975 and 1990, and that since the mid-90s there has

been virtually no increase in net income inequality. At the same time, the Nordic countries that many people on the left want to replicate have seen their inequality increase at a far faster rate than that of the United Kingdom.

It is worth putting those points on the record. We accept that there are issues, but the facts are often not put on the table for the other side.

I move amendment S4M-09926.4, to leave out from “is deeply concerned” to end and insert:

“believes that wealth and income inequality is best tackled by making work pay; understands that such a commitment runs through the ambitions of the UK Government and recognises that, since it came to power, increases to the income tax personal allowance have lifted over three million people on the lowest wages out of income tax; commends the plans for a rise in the minimum wage and welcomes the Chancellor's commitment to fight for full employment; acknowledges the vital steps that the UK Government has taken to put the nation's finances in order, and notes that the UK is currently projected to be the fastest growing of the G7 economies”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. We are tight for time. I call Willie Rennie.

16:44

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I am frustrated by the pockets of poverty that exist in our country. I am impatient and I want to make that change. I want everybody to have a chance to get on in life. SNP members do not have a monopoly on care about such issues. That is why we must focus on the solutions rather than just focusing on the words.

I admire Patrick Harvie's strong socialist rhetoric, but I am rather puzzled by the timid solution. We often hear Patrick Harvie bashing the rich, condemning the establishment and railing against inequality, so I expected something a bit more than what we have in the motion. Perhaps it could have included the nationalisation of all the major industries to control wages, an end to all bonuses for bankers, turning the minimum wage into the living wage, price controls, the nationalisation of housing, or even just one socialist policy that might begin to match Patrick Harvie's powerful rhetoric—but no. What we have in the motion is a call for a proposal to conduct an investigation into the possibility of introducing at some point in the future maximum wage ratios.

Members should not get me wrong; I have no problem with such an investigation. I am sympathetic to the proposal, but I expected something a bit more radical in the motion. The substance of the motion does not match the rhetoric in the speech.

It is, however, fascinating to see that the Scottish Government, which often uses the same

type of rhetoric as Patrick Harvie uses, cannot even bring itself to support that proposal. Again, the Government's rhetoric did not match the timid proposal from the Green Party.

Let us contrast that with the action that has been taken by the UK Government. The national minimum wage has been increased to an hourly rate of £6.50, which delivers an extra £355 per year to a full-time worker. Vince Cable has also committed to supporting future rises as suggested by the Low Pay Commission. There has been a big increase in tax thresholds that will put £700 back into the pockets of those who are on low and medium incomes, but not of those who are on high incomes. The tax threshold will go up to £10,500 next year, and Liberal Democrats want it to go up to £12,500 so that no one who is on the minimum wage will pay any income tax at all. However, after last week's debate on this very subject, the SNP members and the Labour members voted against that proposal, so now we know where they stand on cutting tax on low and middle incomes.

Our tax cut has benefited more than 2 million Scots and has taken more than 200,000 out of paying tax altogether. We have expanded childcare with tax allowances, which gives children hope that they can reach their potential.

Patrick Harvie: Will Willie Rennie take an intervention on that point?

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

Willie Rennie: We have also taken action to tackle tax avoidance, including making 40 changes to tax law since 2010 in order to close avoidance loopholes. We are also working with the G20 and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on a 15-point action plan to counter base erosion and profit shifting. We have limited the pay of the highest earners in the public sector and stopped massive increases in bankers' bonuses at RBS. Our delivery is far more radical than an investigation about a possibility.

16:48

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): A number of people who are in the chamber today will have had the privilege of attending the memorial service for the late Margo MacDonald MSP a couple of weeks ago. During the tributes to Margo, her maiden speech in the House of Commons was quoted. As is traditional, she used her maiden speech to praise her predecessor who was, of course, a Labour MP. She quoted his maiden speech, made in the 1940s, in which he condemned the poverty in which his constituents were living. She made the observation that, in 1973, her constituents in Govan were still

experiencing high levels of poverty, poor housing, and deprivation.

It is 41 years since Margo won that by-election in Govan, and we know that today 870,000 people in Scotland still live in poverty, despite the fact that for the past 33 years Scotland has given more per head to London than it has got back. There is clearly something wrong with the system. We are talking about successive Westminster Labour and Tory Governments that have failed to address the inequalities that Margo identified in her maiden speech and which her predecessor identified in his maiden speech.

Shortly after Margo was elected, Margaret Thatcher began her ascent to power. Most people would understand that that was the time when inequality, particularly between the richest and the poorest, began to increase. That has never been rectified. Throughout years of Labour Government, under Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown, that was not addressed.

I had intended to talk about how this Parliament has addressed some of the inequalities that were identified by Margo back in the 1970s, for example through the universal benefits that were introduced by Labour and the SNP. However, Jackie Baillie's speech was so partisan and misleading that I cannot let it go. We had years of Labour Government at Westminster and here at Holyrood. You talk about household incomes—under Labour, households experienced a 60 per cent rise in council tax.

Jackie Baillie: Will Joan McAlpine take an intervention?

Joan McAlpine: No. I am not taking an intervention. You failed to introduce a living wage. You allowed 600,000 people who were earning less than £16,000 a year to pay prescription charges.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have remarks being made through the chair, please? We will have less "you".

Joan McAlpine: It was a Labour Government at Westminster, with Ed Miliband as the energy secretary, that allowed further deregulation of the energy market that saw a whopping rise in fuel bills. We need take no lectures from Labour on eradicating poverty, because it had its chance.

Drew Smith: Will Joan McAlpine give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her last 50 seconds.

Joan McAlpine: Patrick Harvie said that he deliberately did not mention independence in the motion. I can understand why he wanted to achieve consensus. However, the motion talks about benefits and income inequality, which are

things that can be changed only if we have the powers in this Parliament to do so. It is impossible to ignore independence in this debate. We now know from the Child Poverty Action Group that another 100,000 children will be in poverty by 2020 if we continue with the union and this Westminster Government. If we are going to reduce inequality and reverse the mistakes of the past, Scotland must be independent.

16:52

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):

Most people would accept that we live in an ill-divided world. We need only reflect back on the terrible tragedy in Bangladesh, when thousands lost their lives working virtually in slave conditions, on low wages, to produce goods that many of us are happy to buy cheaply. We know that there are many grieving families in Bhopal who have not had justice after their loved ones lost their lives in dreadful conditions there. Barack Obama has called income inequality

“the defining challenge of our time”.

We do not just see the problems of inequality throughout the rest of the world. We see them here, in this country, too. Many members have alluded to that. It is easy to point the finger of blame at others and to say that it is all their fault. It is right to point to failures of the last Labour Government at Westminster, which probably did not do enough to curb the greed and excesses of the bankers. At the same time, though, we should acknowledge what Gordon Brown did. The introduction of working family credits and pensioner tax credits helped many of the poorest families in this country. Let us get a balance here.

It is right to talk about the failures of the Tory-Lib Dem coalition at Westminster, but will our whole approach to politics in the Scottish Parliament be about defining the failures of others? Will we refuse to look at what we can do to make a difference? As Jackie Baillie pointed out, there are things that can be done by the Scottish Government. As Margaret Burgess and others have said, we do not need independence to make a difference to the lives of many ordinary families in this country. As has been said many times, we can use the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill to make a difference.

However, there are other things that could be done by the Scottish Government. We could do more to help the poor in this country by restoring some of the poverty budgets that have been cut by the Scottish Government, but what about tackling the excesses at the top, which are directly under the control of the Scottish Government? What about doing something about the money that is paid to the top executives of Scottish Water? In

2011-12, the chief executive of Scottish Water had a salary of £240,000. Similarly, the Scottish Government could do something about the hundreds of thousands of pounds that are earned by the chief executives of Scottish Enterprise, of the health boards and of the other public organisations that it funds. Further, the Labour Party should work with the Scottish Government to ask how it can help to control some of the excesses of the chief executives and others in local authorities, who earn obscene amounts of money compared to what the lowest-paid earn.

There is a lot that we can do. It diminishes each and every one of us if all that we can do is say that the fault lies with someone else and that there is nothing we can do here. There is plenty that this Parliament and the Scottish Government can do. We can start by curbing the excesses in the private sector, which are obscene, and the excesses in the public sector, which are within the Government's control at the moment.

16:56

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

I am broadly supportive of the motion. I certainly agree that we need to introduce rules and ensure that we have the right legislation to tax income and wealth and/or to limit incomes.

I was particularly interested in the Conservative amendment and the amendment that was lodged by the Liberal Democrats but was not accepted for debate. Both refer positively to the UK Government, but there the similarity ends. The Liberal Democrats would have left in the entire Green motion, with all its talk of taxation and limiting incomes. By contrast, the Conservatives would wipe out virtually the whole motion.

I am pleased that the Government amendment will leave much in. Specifically, it will keep the bit about

“progressive and redistributive wealth and income taxes.”

That is absolutely right. I think that we all agree that income tax can be used to redistribute income, but we should not forget also that taxes such as inheritance tax are necessary in redistributing wealth.

However, all the taxes and laws have their limitations. People find ways of increasing their income, such as by moving to other countries, or by getting at least part of their pay paid elsewhere, and by using overseas tax havens. Of course, there is the old argument that our businesses will not attract the best people if we do not offer competitive salaries. However, that argument has been slightly undermined by the fact that the UK already overpays people at the top in comparison to other countries, and by the fact that paying high

salaries clearly did not ensure that the banks ran well.

One of the challenges that we face is attitudes. How do we change attitudes? I do not believe that we are going to deal with inequality fully unless we make progress on changing attitudes. Specifically, we need to change the acceptability of greed. Greed is a bad thing and we need to challenge it. However, laws and regulations are not very good at changing people inside. We seem to have become a more greedy society, and there seems to be less of a moral sense in some people that, if we have been fortunate and have done well, we have a duty not to take an unfair share of the cake or, at least, we have a duty to give a chunk of it back to wider society.

I argue that faith has something to say in this regard, although I accept that there are people in the churches who have not always limited their incomes or given away as much as they could have given. Jesus commended a poor woman who had very little, but gave it all away, whereas richer people would give away ostentatious amounts but keep even more for themselves and their own comfort. I therefore argue today that part of the answer to the problem would be to change people's internal attitudes. That can be tackled in a range of ways, but it certainly includes families and schools, in terms of the upbringing and education of children.

Does television advertising encourage children to want more? If we are going to take control of broadcasting at some stage, that is something that we will have to consider.

As Hugh Henry correctly said, the public sector is a factor, so we could set an example. I agree that we should not interfere too much in local government but, in Glasgow, for example, successive chief executives' pay has gone up much faster than that of staff in general. Whether that is the responsibility of Scottish local government, the Scottish Parliament or the Scottish Government, it is certainly a Scottish issue.

I am willing to accept that Glasgow competes with UK cities and that we are not entirely masters of our own destiny—that applies to the public sector and the private sector—but at least we have to try. If we made an attempt to narrow the gap between the top and the bottom, that would be a start. I certainly do not see the present UK Government even attempting to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alex Rowley. You have up to four minutes, Mr Rowley. We are very tight for time, so less would be more, please.

17:00

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I recently met a group of people who worked in private sector care homes. As the discussion went on, I realised that many of them had two things in common: they were absolutely dedicated to caring for the people in the care homes in which they worked, and the majority of them earned the minimum wage.

In terms of the value that we place on people's employment in Scotland, it strikes me that people who care for others are worth much more than the minimum wage, as anybody who has had a member of their family in a care home would say.

Last year, when I was the leader of Fife Council, the Scottish Government did a deal with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities under which it agreed that care homes would be paid a 2.5 per cent increase. Indeed, the Scottish Government had to put some of the money into that.

As the leader of Fife Council, I was also forever being lobbied by care home owners who consistently told me that the cost of introducing the living wage would put them out of business. I sometimes wonder whether the Scottish Government's reluctance to include the living wage in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill has more to do with lobbying and the potential cost than it has to do with the EU.

I point out the report that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation produced today, which argues that the gap in attainment begins before children start school and widens as they get older. The study also found that, in early secondary school, only 28 per cent of children from poorer families performed well in numeracy compared with 56 per cent of those from the least disadvantaged backgrounds.

Educationists and social workers have said for years that they could identify in the early years the children who were less likely to succeed in the education system and, therefore, less likely to succeed throughout their lives and more likely to live on low incomes, in deprivation and in poverty. That cycle of deprivation continues and continues within Scotland. If we are to address it, we must focus our policies on the early years.

A few years ago, the Scottish Government talked about a change fund for the early years. Fife Council made £7.8 million available for that change fund; the Scottish Government made not a penny available. The national health service was to be a partner in that fund but made not a penny available. If we are serious about tackling the early years and doing the work that Fife Council is doing now, money and resources need to be directed into those services so that we improve the life

opportunities of children and so that they start school with a level playing field.

Continuing that investment needs a radical shift in policy. It needs a policy that recognises that the schools in poorer areas are underperforming and that we can do much more there. I have seen that being made a priority in Fife, but it requires political will and the courage of our convictions to put the resources where they will make the biggest difference. The Scottish Government has failed to do that and should consider its policies if it is serious about tackling inequality.

17:04

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I agree with many of the comments that have already been made.

A few weeks ago, while tidying a pile of books, I happened to come across "The Spirit Level", which other members have mentioned, and I started to re-read it. I think that the propositions and analysis that are put forward by the authors of the book, together with the concept of the humankind index, are worth exploring further.

We cannot ignore the fact that life expectancy in rich countries is determined by the size of the income gap. For example, Japan has a narrow gap, which benefits the nation by giving it the highest life expectancy. Japan and Scandinavian countries have lower crime rates and better income equality, whereas the US and UK have a wide income gap and thus higher crime rates. Those findings have been confirmed over many years by Carol Craig and others in their work at the Centre for Confidence and Well-being.

Drew Smith: Does the member appreciate that one of the key arguments in "The Spirit Level" and in the debate that it started is on wage differentials? Can she explain, because none of the other SNP speakers has done so, why the SNP is supporting Margaret Burgess's amendment, which would remove the one and only call in the motion to investigate that very issue?

Maureen Watt: If we are going to make a significant difference on inequality, we need to have all the tools—we cannot just tinker at the edges.

If I needed an extra incentive to campaign with all my might for independence—of course, I do not—it would be the revelation a few weeks ago that the five richest families in the UK are worth more than £28.2 billion while the 20 per cent least well-off, which is 12.6 million people, are worth £28.1 billion. According to Oxfam research, across

the world the richest 85 people share a combined wealth of £1 trillion, which equates to the wealth that is shared by the world's 3.5 billion poorest people. Of course, we are not immune to that inequality in Scotland. The *Sunday Herald* has reported that the richest 10 per cent of households in Scotland have 900 times the accumulated wealth of the poorest 10 per cent.

The reason why the politicians and lawmakers on the SNP benches want full power and responsibility over our economy is so that we can start redressing the balance, because evidence tells us that, under the previous Labour Government and the current Tory-Lib Dem one, inequality has increased in the UK as a whole.

I am old enough to remember that, in previous periods of recession, when London had a cold, Scotland got the flu. However, with the Parliament and the SNP Scottish Government, we have been able to use our limited powers to mitigate some of the effects, although it is still the poorest who suffer, as we can see from the rise of food banks.

Why is it that Westminster takes a light-touch approach to tax avoidance and evasion while welfare recipients are attacked with the harshest of penalties? Why are welfare budgets capped when budgets for Trident and arms are allowed to run out of control? Why are company directors allowed to scratch one another's backs by offering small cliques absurd sums in fees and to give chief executives huge sums on a never-ending upward spiral, with which the public sector has to compete?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please draw to a close.

Maureen Watt: However, it is obvious, having listened to Hugh Henry, that salaries in Labour-controlled councils will start to come down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your last five seconds.

Maureen Watt: In conclusion, examples worldwide show that less inequality leads to a stronger economy and a society that is more comfortable with itself. However, given Westminster's record, we cannot wait for the other parties to do anything different.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As we move to the closing speeches, I remind members who have taken part in the debate that they should be in the chamber.

17:08

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): They say of socialists that, sooner or later, they will run out of other people's money. Listening to some of the speeches that have been made

makes me think that some of us might live long enough to see that point proven once again.

The fact is that the left-wing consensus in the Parliament offers Scotland nothing except dishonesty. When we hear the continual repetition of the line that the gap between rich and poor is somehow increasing in Scotland, we are hearing something that the facts simply do not bear out.

I aspire to a different approach. I believe that this country needs smaller Government, less regulation, lower taxation and a rebalancing between the public and private sectors. People should keep more of the money that they earn, particularly those who are at the average and below average end of the wage scale. That is why I am proud of the UK Government's record. The Conservatives and their Liberal Democrat colleagues have done much to take the low paid out of tax—in some cases altogether.

It is vital that we understand what Scotland needs for its long-term prosperity. We should ensure that people keep more of the money that they earn and that we do not make the mistake that Margaret Burgess highlighted in her opening remarks. She said that property ownership is one of the key measures of wealth. That was from the housing minister who is currently taking away the right of individual tenants to buy their own homes. That is a hypocrisy if ever there was one.

It seems that a separate Scotland, as described by the Scottish National Party, would be in the business of seizing wealth and property and exploiting that money for the benefit of what the SNP saw as its priorities rather than the priorities of the people. That would create what can only be described as a client economy. It would not be an economy of independence; it would be an economy of dependence and nothing else.

We have been told again that the welfare system is broken and cannot work for Scotland. Why is there no formal proposal for change? Why is there no budget for change? The truth is that the Scottish Government has no intention of changing anything, and the more we ask, the more we are disappointed about where that will go.

Surely if we are to talk in the chamber about the redistribution of wealth, it is at least as important that we talk about the creation of wealth. That is why the Conservatives will continue to work for and aspire to full employment, taking the low paid out of tax altogether, and giving the low paid the opportunity to own property and to acquire or accrue wealth over time. We believe that those who can work should work rather than rely for their livelihood on the tax that is paid by their neighbours. Those on higher incomes already pay a higher proportion of total income tax revenue

than they did under the previous Labour Government.

The acute labour shortages that we currently see in some areas in the Scottish economy show us that wages can be driven up in that economic environment. Those lessons need to be learned and applied elsewhere.

We know that the lesson is that price fixing and wage fixing, as attempted by previous Governments, particularly in the 1970s, have a disastrous and negative effect. I believe in liberal economic theory, that we in Scotland should apply it, and that the Green Party's approach is authoritarian socialist dogma of the worst possible kind.

17:12

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The debate has been very interesting. Various points have been raised across the chamber, and I would like to reflect on some of them.

I will start with the minister's remarks. Margaret Burgess said that the Government is doing what it can to tackle inequality now with the available resources. I have sat in the Parliament for three years now, and I can say to the minister that I believe that that is completely untrue.

That is evidenced by many of the reports that have come out. We have reflected on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, which talked about the attainment gap between the poorest and the richest households. The children in the poorest households are not doing as well at school. That gap is not a small one; it is very wide.

The progress that the Government has made over the past eight years with full control over education has been absolutely minuscule. I heard of a school in my region in which 40 per cent of the pupils in secondary 1 had a primary 2 reading and writing age. That is absolutely disgraceful in a developed nation and a developed economy. We should be spending every minute in the Parliament looking at that.

My colleague Alex Rowley made a powerful speech that touched on a number of things. He talked about numeracy that is just not up to scratch. Literacy and numeracy are two big problems in our education system. Our poorest children are not succeeding and are not getting the support that they need.

I sat in a meeting of the Education and Culture Committee with Joan McAlpine, who spoke earlier in this debate, when we had a panel of four educationists in front of us. She asked them what more powers we would need in order to improve education in this country. Every one of the

panellists said that to do that we need not more powers but political will and ideas.

Joan McAlpine: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: No. I am sorry, but I do not have time for interventions.

We need action from the SNP, but it is taking out literacy support in Dundee; it is taking out the early years practitioners who work in the poorest schools supporting the teaching of literacy and numeracy, in order to cover the pledge on 600 hours of childcare. Derek Mackay and Margaret Burgess know that that is the case.

The minister said that they were taking every opportunity to negotiate with the EU on the living wage. Again, I say to the minister that that is completely untrue. The Scottish Government is prepared to take its fight on minimum alcohol pricing to the EU and see it through, but it is not prepared to do that for the living wage. Alex Rowley perhaps pinpointed the reason for that, which is lobbying on the cost of the commitment to the living wage.

Despite advice from the European Commission and EU spokespeople that the rules allow it, the Scottish Government is not prepared to include a provision on the living wage in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill. The Government is not prepared to put its money where its mouth is and support the introduction of the living wage. It is just wrong for the minister to suggest that the Government is prepared to do that.

I turn to the Government's pledge on cutting corporation tax.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your final 25 seconds.

Jenny Marra: It is the only tax pledge in the Government's white paper. The Government talks about poverty, but there are no pledges on tax policy for anyone but business. How about income tax? How about tax credits? How about the personal allowance? There is not one tax pledge or idea for working people.

On my final point, Presiding Officer, energy bills dropped by £100 under Ed Miliband as energy minister—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Jenny Marra: Joan McAlpine was clearly not in the chamber on the day when the energy minister, Fergus Ewing, reacted to Labour proposals for an energy price freeze.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thanks very much—

Jenny Marra: Such regulation was anathema to Fergus Ewing. The SNP should be taking action.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call on Margaret Burgess—up to six minutes, please.

17:17

Margaret Burgess: I cannot say that this has been the most consensual debate that we have had in the chamber, but I would say that there has been consensus—I do not include our Tory colleagues in it—on the gap between the rich and the poor and that we have to do something to tackle that. I will take on a couple of points that have been made during the debate.

Like Joan McAlpine, I was amazed when I heard some of the comments from the Labour Party, whose members speak as if the Labour Party has never had an opportunity in the UK or Scottish Parliaments to do something about the suggestions that its members make. The income and wealth gap is continuing to widen, but that has happened under successive Westminster Governments.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Margaret Burgess: No, I am not taking an intervention at this point.

As I said, the gap has continued to widen under successive Westminster Governments, which have not dealt with it properly.

There was mention earlier of the minimum wage. The reason why we have both a minimum wage and a living wage is because the minimum wage was set too low and successive Westminster Governments have not kept it up in line with inflation—something that a Scottish Government in an independent Scotland would do. That is why we have a minimum wage that keep people cannot live off, which is a disgrace. That is a Westminster policy and it is responsible for that.

I will say again, as clearly as I can, that the Scottish Government is absolutely committed to the living wage and to promoting it. We have set an example in that regard. However, we have legal advice, which has been published, that tells us that we cannot include a provision in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill to make the living wage mandatory.

That said, the Deputy First Minister has made crystal clear our intention on the living wage and how that will be addressed by stage 3 amendments to the bill. Local authorities and those bidding to procure public contracts will be in no doubt about the Scottish Government's position on a living wage. I absolutely refute everything that Alex Rowley said on that and his suggestion that

we are being lobbied in some way on the living wage—that is simply not true. We absolutely support a living wage.

We will also maintain the minimum wage and increase it in line with inflation, as we would do with tax credits and other social security benefits. That has not happened in the past.

There was some criticism from the members on the Conservative benches of our position on tax. It was said that we have nothing laid out on tax. Unfortunately I have only six minutes for this speech, but I refer members to the whole section in the white paper “Scotland’s Future” that covers our position on a tax system in Scotland. We set out our early priorities, which focus on fairness and economic growth. We are absolutely committed to building—

Gavin Brown: Will the minister give way?

Drew Smith: Will the minister give way?

Margaret Burgess: As I was talking about the Conservatives, I give way to Gavin Brown.

Gavin Brown: What specific changes would be made to income tax as early priorities?

Margaret Burgess: If Gavin Brown wants me to say what the rate will be set at, my response is that that will be for future Scottish Governments. What I will say is that we are committed to building a tax system that stimulates the economy, builds social cohesion and sustains Scotland’s public services. As I said earlier, the Institute for Fiscal Studies says that a new nation and a new state designing a new system can only be better. We can make savings in doing that, and we can certainly do something about the tax avoidance that currently happens—we will deal with that as well.

Full fiscal responsibility would allow key decisions on taxation—

Drew Smith: Will the minister give way?

Margaret Burgess: I have two minutes left.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I think that that is a no, Mr Smith. Sit down, please.

Margaret Burgess: I have given way in both of my speeches in the debate and I have done so more than any other member.

The current UK tax system is complex and costly. Independence would allow us to design a simpler and cheaper system.

We heard a lot from Willie Rennie and his Conservative colleagues about tax credits and what they are doing in terms of low pay and tax, but the UK Treasury’s own analysis shows that households will be worse off as a result of changes to taxation, benefits and public spending

that the UK Government is implementing. The average household will be the equivalent of £757 worse off in 2015-16 as a result of cuts to public services, benefit reforms and tax changes that the UK Government has already announced and which are due to be implemented. On the same basis, households in the bottom income quintile will suffer cuts that are equivalent to £814 a year.

What we are hearing from the UK Government shows that it is giving money in one way but that that money is going in another way, and the poor are becoming worse off. The UK Government’s own analysis shows that.

I agree that wealth redistribution alone is not enough to reduce inequality, but “Scotland’s Future” sets out a broad approach to tackling inequality. There is political will from the SNP and the Government to do that. We want to help people to move into sustained work, to support people to develop skills and to make progress that will help to support better solidarity and cohesion in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: You should close, minister.

Margaret Burgess: I end by repeating something that I said earlier: only independence will help us to build a fairer and more prosperous Scotland where we can finally eradicate inequality and poverty.

17:23

Patrick Harvie: I thank members for their contributions. Apparently I am an authoritarian socialist and also not radical enough for a Liberal Democrat. Maybe the truth is somewhere in between.

I begin by giving credit where credit is due. In her opening speech, Margaret Burgess gave a staunch defence of universal services, and I agreed with that whole-heartedly. She talked about the Scottish Government’s national performance framework, which takes steps in the direction of a broader measure of economic success than simply growth. It does not go as far as I would like, but I welcome the fact that it takes steps in the right direction. She said clearly that she believes that the Westminster system has failed and will not deliver in the future.

However, when challenged by Gavin Brown to say what income tax changes the SNP would implement, she did not have specifics to offer. She said—and she repeated at the end of her closing speech—that only independence can deliver the change that we need. No. If we have the political will and we do not have independence, we can only do a little, but if we have independence and we do not have the political will, we can do

nothing. We need to have both. I implore colleagues who support independence, as I do, to recognise that it is not the only thing that we need.

When the minister was challenged by John Finnie on corporation tax cuts and bungs from the taxpayer for tax dodgers such as Amazon, I am afraid that it would be polite to say that she struggled.

Willie Rennie asked for something more radical. I am happy to send him a copy of the Green Party manifesto, where he can read all about the citizens income, a shorter working week, land value tax and community and public ownership. However, this debate was not intended to be about the Green Party's manifesto; it was intended to seek agreement on the principle. I am sorry if Willie Rennie does not care to join that agreement—I regret that—but his saying so frees me up to say that, if I am being timid, at least I am not simply saying, "Please let me join up with the Tories, and I will try to give a hard-right Government a kinder face."

John Mason was quite right to say that the Tory amendment is the only one that seeks to delete the whole motion and every aspect of the argument about inequality. He also made an important argument about greed, quite rightly. It was a faith-based argument, and from his perspective that is honest, of course. However, I politely point out that religion, and Christianity in particular, can be advanced by him to make a good point about greed or advanced by David Cameron to defend his Government and its dismal record.

I apologise to Gavin Brown for mishearing him on the cost of welfare. To hear "million" instead of "billion" is to make no small error. Perhaps in addition to having a more sustainable transport policy we will need to put up with an end to tax avoidance and the cancellation of Trident renewal—I guess I could live with that if that is what it takes to fund a welfare state that is worthy of the name.

Jackie Baillie talked sincerely about what Labour values mean to her. She said that sharing wealth is what Labour is all about and is at the core of everything that Labour does. I welcome that intent and I do not for a moment doubt its sincerity, but just as I want my fellow independence supporters to accept that independence by itself gives no guarantees in that regard, I want Jackie Baillie to acknowledge that a Labour Government gives no guarantees either.

Let us remember those 13 years of Labour government when we saw the continuation of corporation tax cuts that were begun by the predecessor Government. There has been little interruption in the downward graph of corporation

tax during Tory, Labour and coalition Governments at UK level. Let us remember that Mr Mandelson said that he was extremely comfortable with people becoming immensely wealthy. New Labour, in 13 years of government, sought accommodation with the neoliberal model; it did not seek its defeat. That is the most important point to remember.

We need the political will. Whether people want to change the UK Government or the UK constitution, neither gives a guarantee of success—[*Interruption.*] I can hear someone heckling behind me, saying that there is no guarantee in much of what we do in life, if that is what—

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): No, I said that there is no guarantee of success.

Patrick Harvie: That is absolutely true. This debate should be about opening up the possibilities and giving ourselves the chance to make progress towards a fairer and more equal society. None of us should imagine or seek to pretend that our policy on the constitution or a change of Government gives that guarantee.

Last year, the Green and independent debate was about the legacy of the Thatcher Government. The timing was controversial but, apart from the Conservative defence of that Government, there was an acknowledgement from most members of the damaging effects of the Thatcher legacy. The fiercest critics of the Thatcher Government must acknowledge that it had a deep, profound and lasting impact. What is needed now is nothing less: a political transformation that is every bit as dramatic, every bit as deep and every bit as lasting.

There are those who want to change the UK Government and there are those who want to leave the UK. I have empathy with both groups. However, whichever objective we have, my fear is that the tribal hostility between us could threaten our ability to deliver the kind of political transformation that our country needs when 19 September comes around. When 19 September comes around, we must accept the result. If Scotland votes yes, those who campaigned to stay in the union will have to accept that we have the responsibility to take up the challenge that the Scottish people have given us and try to achieve that political transformation; if Scotland votes no, those who campaigned for a yes vote will have to accept that our responsibility is to achieve as much political progress as we can within the limits that the Scottish people have chosen to endorse.

The Presiding Officer: You need to wind up, Mr Harvie.

Patrick Harvie: I once again thank all members for their speeches. Perhaps this is a debate that we can have properly only after 19 September; nevertheless, I am grateful for members' engagement on the issue beforehand.

Business Motions

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09941, 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 13 May 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 14 May 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Education and Lifelong Learning

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Time to Shine Youth Arts Strategy

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 May 2014

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

followed by Scottish Government Homecoming Scotland 2014 Debate:

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 20 May 2014

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
 5.30 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Wednesday 21 May 2014
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Commonwealth Games, Sports,
 Equalities and Pensioners' Rights;
 Training, Youth and Female
 Employment
 2:40 pm General Questions
 3:00 pm First Minister's Questions
 3:30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.30 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09942, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 2 timetable for the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Housing (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 6 June 2014.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-09943, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, motion S4M-09944, on parliamentary recess dates, and motion S4M-09945, on the office of the clerk.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scotland Act 1998 (Modification of Schedule 5) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 7 to 15 February 2015 (inclusive), 4 to 19 April 2015 (inclusive), 27 June to 30 August 2015 (inclusive), 10 to 25 October 2015 (inclusive) and 19 December 2015 to 4 January 2016 (inclusive).

That the Parliament agrees that between 5 January 2015 and 5 January 2016, the Office of the Clerk will be open on all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 3 and 6 April 2015, 4 May 2015, 22 May and 25 May 2015, 27 November 2015, 24 December (pm), 25 and 28 December 2015, 1 and 4 January 2016.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

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

Decision Time

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are 11 questions to be put as a result of today's business, so you need to pay attention. I remind members that, with regard to the energy and climate change debate, if the amendment in the name of John Swinney is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Iain Gray and Murdo Fraser fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-09927.3, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09927, in the name of Alison Johnstone, on energy and climate change, 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, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

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)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

Abstentions

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)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 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)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)

McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 16, Abstentions 37.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendments in the name of Iain Gray and Murdo Fraser fall.

The next question is, that motion S4M-09927, in the name of Alison Johnstone, on energy and climate change, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 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)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 114, Against 4, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that Scotland has a rich diversity of energy sources including a very successful oil and gas sector and growing expertise in renewables including wind, wave and tidal; welcomes Scotland's evidence-based approach to unconventional fossil fuels; supports the ongoing review of the scientific evidence by the expert scientific panel in relation to unconventional fossil fuels and looks forward to its report; welcomes the Scottish Government's announcement of a strengthening of Scottish planning policy, coming into force in June 2014, in relation to unconventional fossil fuel extraction as an indication that the concerns of environmental campaigners and local communities are taken seriously; further welcomes the recent UK Committee on Climate Change report that praised Scottish progress in decarbonising its energy sector; notes that almost half of Scotland's electricity is now delivered from renewables, and further notes that Scotland has the world's leading climate change legislation and the largest carbon emission reductions in western Europe.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-09926.3, in the name of Margaret Burgess, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09926, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on wealth and income inequality, 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, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
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)
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (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)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
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)
Bibby, Neil (West 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)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (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)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 60, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-09926.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09926, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on wealth and income inequality, as amended, 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)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)

McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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 43, Against 75, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-09926.4, in the name of Gavin Brown, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09926, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on wealth and income inequality, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

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)
 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)

Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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 16, Against 101, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09926, in the name of Patrick Harvie, on wealth and income inequality, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunningham South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunningham North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Bibby, Neil (West 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)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (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)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (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)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament is deeply concerned at the current and predicted level of wealth and income inequality and identifies tackling this inequality as key to creating a fair and successful society; understands that achieving greater equality will require closing the gap between the highest and lowest incomes, as well as progressive and redistributive wealth and income taxes; believes that everyone deserves a fair and decent wage for work that provides for them to live with dignity and that employers should not rely on the benefit system to subsidise poverty pay; condemns examples of unfair and excessive pay, such as the attempt by the Royal Bank of Scotland to pay bonuses worth 200% of salaries to its executives; welcomes the EU cap on bonuses, first proposed by the Greens-European Free Alliance group in the European Parliament, which came into force in 2014, and recognises that it is only when the Parliament has full control over taxation and benefits that Scotland will be able to address wealth and income inequality properly.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09943, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scotland Act 1998 (Modification of Schedule 5) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09944, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on parliamentary recess dates, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 7 to 15 February 2015 (inclusive), 4 to 19 April 2015 (inclusive), 27 June to 30 August 2015 (inclusive), 10 to 25 October 2015 (inclusive) and 19 December 2015 to 4 January 2016 (inclusive).

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-09945, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the office of the clerk, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that between 5 January 2015 and 5 January 2016, the Office of the Clerk will be open on

all days except: Saturdays and Sundays, 3 and 6 April 2015, 4 May 2015, 22 May and 25 May 2015, 27 November 2015, 24 December (pm), 25 and 28 December 2015, 1 and 4 January 2016.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Halbeath Park and Ride

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-09382, in the name of Alex Rowley, on Halbeath park and ride. I have had instructions on how to pronounce "Halbeath" correctly.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the opening of the Halbeath Park and Ride scheme, which provides 1,000 free car parking spaces, including 48 disabled bays and 12 electric car charging bays, to residents of Cowdenbeath, Dunfermline and the surrounding towns and villages; understands that the scheme is already proving extremely popular with commuters and is a welcome transport link connecting Fife to the rest of Scotland, and considers that a rail link and railway station at the site would further the economic and transport potential of the scheme.

17:41

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):

I acknowledge that Halbeath park-and-choose facility, which we are here to discuss, was established with investment of £7 million from the Scottish Government and £2.5 million from Europe. That was very much welcomed when the investment was made, and when the Minister for Transport and Veterans joined Councillor Pat Callaghan for the opening of the facility.

In speaking to the motion tonight, I am asking that the Scottish Government make further funding available to create a rail halt at the Halbeath park and choose, which is situated in my constituency, at Crossgates, and which is accessible to people throughout Fife and much further afield. A rail halt at Halbeath would take some of the pressure off the rail halt and car parks at Inverkeithing station, and it would greatly improve the choice at Halbeath. Halbeath is strategically located, close to the M90, A90 and A92. It sits alongside the Fife circle railway and is well positioned to become one of Scotland's key multimodal transport interchanges.

The strategic transport projects review of 2009 identified both a park-and-ride bus site and a park-and-ride rail halt, with rail improvements between Inverkeithing and Halbeath. The first step towards achieving that objective would be to put the rail halt in. It could be linked to the Fife circle route, thereby giving people access to the railway as currently operated. Adding a rail halt and providing a visible and accessible park-and-choose facility would increase people's choice and would achieve the aim of making public transport more competitive with the car.

Currently, 23 million vehicles cross the Forth road bridge every year. Approximately 3,500 vehicles per hour flow into Edinburgh and the

Lothians. At peak times, trains running southbound number eight per hour, with an average of 400 passengers per train. That is 3,200 passengers an hour. More than 10,000 passengers come out of Fife by train every morning into Edinburgh and the Lothians. There are more than 100 train services in each direction every day. I believe that it therefore makes sense to build a rail halt at Halbeath. Of the traffic that flows on to the road bridge, 20 per cent of it comes down the M90 from Perth and Kinross, past Halbeath park and choose, and on to the bridge; 25 per cent of the traffic comes along the A92 from the Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes area, past the park and choose, and on to the bridge; and 29 per cent comes from Dunfermline, next to the park and choose, and goes on to the bridge.

In the medium term, it makes even more sense to make the investment that would result in the construction of a direct dual-track rail link between Inverkeithing and the Halbeath park and choose. Such investment would reduce train journey times between Edinburgh and Perth, and Aberdeen and Inverness, and would reduce times for Fife services. It would also improve access to the port of Rosyth, which would be an economic boost to the port. The Halbeath park and choose would then be at full capacity, which is currently 1,000 car parking places. We would have the good problem of having to look for more car-parking places.

The park and choose is not just about cars. Buses run to it from communities across Fife, so the investment that I am calling for would mean that we would have a properly integrated public transport system.

Step 1 is the rail halt, and step 2 is the new direct rail link between Inverkeithing and Halbeath. Such a development would improve journey times and connections. It would tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport, which have an impact on the potential for continued economic growth in Fife and in the east of Scotland.

The development would reduce emissions, which would tackle problems of climate change, air quality and health improvement. It would be accessible and affordable and it would give people a choice of public transport. Availability would mean better-quality transport services, value for money and an alternative to the car.

I am totally committed to better transport links between Edinburgh and Glasgow, because I recognise that they are the two cities that are the key drivers of the Scottish economy. Crucial to that strategy is the city region agenda and the city region link, and crucial to that in the east of Scotland is investment in the Fife infrastructure, including the railways.

The creation of a new rail link between Inverkeithing and Halbeath is crucial to connectivity. I call for the rail halt and the station to be put in place at the park and choose as a first step. I am grateful to the members who have stayed for the debate and I hope that we can make progress in the interests of the east of Scotland economy.

17:47

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing the debate. As the Presiding Officer knows, I am afraid that I will be unable to stay for the entire debate or to hear the minister's response. I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, to the minister and to Alex Rowley. However, I look forward to reading the debate in the *Official Report* tomorrow.

It is clear that the Halbeath park-and-ride scheme, which was—as we heard—funded principally by the Scottish Government, has been a great success, notwithstanding that it opened only in late November last year. The offer of 1,000 free car parking spaces, including 48 disabled bays and 12 electric-car charging bays, is hugely attractive to the residents of Cowdenbeath, Dunfermline and the surrounding area. That is why Fife residents are enthusiastically using this excellent facility. It is also worth mentioning that the hub building has facilities that are important for the convenience of travellers who use the park and ride.

As we look to the future, it is to be noted that the strategic transport projects review's recommendations include a railway line between Inverkeithing and Halbeath in the form of a new double-track rail link. I understand that although that development would not significantly reduce passenger journey times, the greater benefit would be to freight transport at Rosyth port. That would be welcome; I note that Alex Rowley welcomed that potential.

The strategic transport projects review covers a 20-year period to 2032, so it is clear that the timing of any such development will depend on resources becoming available. It is worth pointing out that we in the Parliament do not at this time control all our resources; rather, we operate by way of a fixed budget that Westminster metes out. Instead of controlling 100 per cent of our tax base, we control the miserly amount of 7 per cent.

In addition to that, we have had since 2010-11 a cut of more than 25 per cent in our capital budget. I submit that any calls for major capital expenditure must be considered in that constrained budgetary context. I add that people like me who advocate a yes vote do not consider

those constraints acceptable in what could be the 14th-richest country in the world.

The SNP Government has made considerable investment in our transport network, notwithstanding the constraints that are currently being applied. A key example of that for residents of Fife is the new Forth replacement crossing. An important part of the related developments are the bus lanes that are already included in the M9 and M90 links to facilitate shorter travel times between Halbeath and Edinburgh.

I recently wrote to the south east of Scotland transport partnership about the rail halt at Halbeath because, on the face of it, the STPR recommendations do not provide for it. SEStran's reply to me, which is dated 9 April 2014, states:

"In answer to your specific question, I can advise that the scheme does not feature in the SEStran and Fife Council projects in our bid for the Scottish Stations Fund."

I was a bit surprised by that, because there is a £30 million Scottish stations fund and it is not clear to me why it has not yet been considered a priority to commence the preparatory work that would need to be carried out prior to making an application to the fund. I hope that SEStran and Fife Council change their minds and prioritise the proposal for a halt at Halbeath, and ensure that the preparatory work is commenced with a view to making an application to the Scottish stations fund. I suggest that, while they are at it, they also address the lack of reasonable disabled access to Cowdenbeath train station and see what can be done to tackle that long-standing problem.

17:51

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing this debate on the Halbeath park and ride. Although the park and ride is in his Cowdenbeath constituency, Halbeath village is in my constituency and the facility is accessed by a large number of my constituents across Dunfermline and west Fife.

Halbeath is rapidly growing and changing. Hundreds of new houses are being built right next to Halbeath village and many more are in the pipeline for the nearby Shepherd Offshore site and the wider Duloch area—I recently met representatives of the NHBC, who told me that there are more house completions in that area than in any other part of Scotland. Although that is good news for my constituency, the current infrastructure, including schools and transport links, has struggled to keep pace with the change.

One of the biggest issues that constituents are raising with me is difficulty in parking at train stations. Most car parks in the area are full by 8 o'clock in the morning, making it difficult for people to access train services into Edinburgh and

beyond. Many commuters from across Fife and Perthshire park at Inverkeithing train station, which is struggling to cope with the demand. For many of my constituents, there is no option but to face the traffic and drive across the Forth bridge.

As Alex Rowley said, 23 million vehicles cross the Forth road bridge every year, which is around 30,000 a day from Monday to Friday every week. Transport Scotland has found that 29 per cent of all journeys that are made across the Forth bridge start at Dunfermline, with the majority being made by people who are commuting into the Edinburgh area for work. That flow will only increase as Dunfermline's population continues to expand, with people taking advantage not only of Dunfermline being a fantastic place to live but of house prices there being substantially lower than in the Edinburgh area.

At Halbeath park and ride, there are 1,000 car parking spaces. It is already a popular transport hub that caters for those who want to park and ride, and for those who want to car share. It could be much more. Halbeath's location, just off the M90/A90/A92 corridor and the Fife railway circle, means that it is ideally placed—as Alex Rowley said—to be one of Scotland's key multimodal transport interchanges. A train station and rail halt at Halbeath would be a huge boost for my constituents in Dunfermline, for Fife and for Scotland. It would be a real boost for our local economy, local jobs and local businesses, and it would provide much-needed infrastructure to support the ever-growing eastern expansion in my constituency as well as the new expansion that is planned for the north of Dunfermline. It would also make public transport more accessible and a more viable alternative, improving journey times into Edinburgh and beyond not just for Fifers, but for everyone travelling by train between Aberdeen, Inverness, Perth and Edinburgh. Crucially, it would help in the drive to ensure that Scotland meets its ambitious climate change targets, reducing air pollution levels and carbon emissions.

Linked to that development must be an investment in making Halbeath park and choose more accessible to pedestrians. I commend the excellent work of Living Streets Scotland, which has been working closely with the Halbeath tenants and residents association in my constituency to improve the environment for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. One of the key long-term issues raised by local residents is access to the Halbeath facility. Currently, unless they travel there by car or bus, there is simply no safe way for local residents to get there from Halbeath or from the Duloch area.

Both Transport Scotland and Fife Council need to do more to make the Halbeath facility a genuine travel option for many of my constituents who

either do not have a car or simply want to leave the car at home. One of the six Transport Scotland objectives for the ScotRail franchise is to improve accessibility to services and stations, so it is absolutely vital that any plans for a new railway station include well-lit walking routes that allow the community on its doorstep to walk or cycle there safely.

Clearly, as Alex said, it all comes at a cost, but I believe that it is an investment that the Scottish Government should be prepared to make and one that would deliver real returns, not just for Fife but for Scotland. It is time to be more ambitious for our railways and for the public transport, cycling and walking network across Scotland. Alex has already asked the minister to commit to ensuring that the funding is in place to make that a reality, and I echo his request. I hope that the minister will confirm that the funding and timescale for that vital and strategically important project will be put in place, because it will make a huge difference, not just to the Fife economy and to Fife commuters, but to Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that it is important to use people's full names. It is a matter of accessibility.

17:56

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I, too, add my congratulations to Alex Rowley on securing this debate on the Halbeath park and ride. The new Forth bridge is an exciting development and one that is essential to the continued growth of Fife and of Scotland's economy, and it is one for which I and other Labour party members in Fife campaigned over a long period. There has been a huge increase in west Fife's population in recent years, and improved transport links over the Forth are needed to support the economies of Edinburgh, Fife and the central belt.

Since I became an MSP, I have become a regular user of public transport between Fife and Edinburgh and have gained an insight into the trials and tribulations of the travel choices facing commuters from west Fife. Like many other commuters, my decision to take the car, bus or train is influenced by the weather, my diary and things that I have to do later in the day, which might include work or family commitments, shopping or even socialising. Timing is critical. I have learned that the car parks at Inverkeithing, Rosyth, Dunfermline Town and Dunfermline Queen Margaret stations are usually full on week days by 8 o'clock, and it is often standing room only on the peak-time trains between Edinburgh and Fife.

If one does have to use one's car to drive over the bridge, the traffic on the approach can often tail back well beyond the junctions off the M90, and then one has to find somewhere to park at an affordable rate when one gets to Edinburgh. Car sharing is an option, but in my experience, despite there now being three Labour MSPs travelling from west Fife to the Scottish Parliament every day, different schedules can make car sharing difficult.

Although it has been open only a matter of months, the success of the new park and ride at Halbeath in boosting bus travel is entirely understandable. That said, there is more that could be done and I am pleased that the motion recognises the opportunity to increase the potential of the scheme. We now have 1,000 spaces at Halbeath, where the choice for car drivers is limited to bus or car share, in a facility that is surrounded by new housing development—in the eastern expansion at Dunfermline, at Kelty, just off the next junction on the M90, and in the village of Crossgates, which is located right beside the park and ride and has seen several new neighbourhoods added to the village in recent years, and is still growing.

There is much that could be done to improve the value of the site in promoting modal shift away from car use, and the most obvious improvement would be the installation of a rail halt and railway station. There is a clear demand for that. As I mentioned, many of the car parks at stations in west Fife are often full to overflowing, which creates inevitable overspill into surrounding streets and inconvenience for local residents. It has even been suggested that some of the well-documented parking problems at Queen Margaret hospital are caused by overspill parking from the nearby Dunfermline Queen Margaret station.

Although I live in Dunfermline and it is only 1.6 miles from my house to the station, I tend to take the car to the station. Walking is not always convenient and for many people it is not possible, because of time constraints or mobility problems, so access to transport interchanges is a key factor in considering whether the travelling public will use them.

I would like to thank Living Streets, which has made me aware of the work that it did with residents of Halbeath and has called for improvements to the local environment for pedestrians of all ages and abilities, and for the removal of barriers and the creation of new paths in the local community, which would give local residents, as well as those arriving by car, the opportunity to use the new facility. I will be asking Fife Council to keep that on its radar.

Until just a few weeks ago, I was the Fife councillor for Crossgates, where the park and ride

is sited. The community council regularly complained to me that the facility should be called Crossgates park and ride, and that it should be accessible to pedestrians and cyclists from the village. Having failed to get the name changed, I am keen to do what I can to widen access for local people. Crossgates has a proud record of environmental activism and it wants to see that extended to its travel choices.

There is a similar access issue in Cowdenbeath, which has a train station just over three miles from the new park and ride. Anyone who made the journey to Cowdenbeath for the recent by-election will know that the station is not accessible to people who have mobility problems and there is no adjacent taxi access or parking. A new rail halt, although not in the town itself, could provide additional accessible options for rail travellers in Fife while easing the pressure on stations such as Cowdenbeath.

At the heart of the park and ride, and of any public transport development, should be a commitment to the needs of those who use the services and those who could be encouraged or assisted to do so. It is equally important to improve the quality of life for people who live in communities surrounding railway stations and other transport hubs.

The Halbeath facility has the potential to deliver modal shift, support low carbon options, increase local access, and provide for increased mobility. We must surely aim for that.

18:01

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): I congratulate Alex Rowley on securing his first members' business debate. He has raised an issue that is important to the people of Fife and to everyone who travels across the Forth on this route, as I often do myself.

The benefits of the Halbeath park-and-ride scheme are undeniable. As Alex Rowley mentioned, I was pleased to go along to the start of the works and to their completion. It is a fantastic facility that was delivered by a local company in co-operation with Fife Council. It provides additional capacity for Edinburgh commuters, an alternative interchange for journeys across Fife, and a service for travellers to Edinburgh airport. It also provides a further facility for long-distance coach services.

This project, together with the existing highly successful Inverkeithing park and ride, which was mentioned earlier, complements the Forth replacement crossing—the Queensferry crossing—which is the largest civil engineering scheme in Scotland for a generation. When the Queensferry crossing opens in 2016, bus

passengers who use the park-and-ride facilities will enjoy substantial reductions in their journey times. Those reductions of up to 30 minutes between Halbeath and west Edinburgh will come about because of our investment in new motorway bus lanes and the creation of a dedicated public transport corridor on the existing Forth road bridge.

Much of what we want to do on transport comes down to resources. Even within Fife Council's area—and this is replicated across Scotland—we have demands for a St Andrews rail link and for rail development at Leven. If we add that to the £1.4 billion that is being spent on the Forth replacement crossing, and the money that has been spent on the park and ride that has been linked to the new crossing, we can see that substantial investment has been made, and there are substantial demands for further investment. That is true across the country, but we have to prioritise.

As Annabelle Ewing mentioned, we have had substantial cuts. More than a quarter of our capital has been cut since 2010-11. Despite that, we have sought to maintain our investment in Scotland's infrastructure. Members have mentioned the pressure on train station parking facilities. That is down to the fact that record numbers of passenger journeys—up to 85 million—are being made by train. We will make further substantial investment—£5 billion—in our rail infrastructure over the next control period.

I was interested in Cara Hilton's point about walking to the park and ride. There is scope for that. Fife Council can bid for the Sustrans money that will be made available for joint projects. It is welcome that she has mentioned the issue, because it is often talked about only in relation to cycling. Walking is very important and, as she said, the route should be well lit and safe for the people who want to use it. There is scope to do that just now and I am interested in listening to any proposal. It would have to be made with the co-operation of Fife Council, but we are happy to consider it.

We recognise the importance of infrastructure to sustaining our economy and, as Alex Rowley said, to providing access to opportunities and bringing our communities together. We believe that the investments that we have made have helped to deliver that. The construction of these projects has helped the economy by creating jobs, as capital projects tend to be labour intensive.

We remain committed to delivering the recommendations of the 2008 strategic transport projects review, which includes the Inverkeithing to Halbeath line, although, as Annabelle Ewing mentioned, it is over the timescale. We will deliver projects as and when resources allow, because

our commitments must be conditional on having the funds to deliver them. We recognise that the Inverkeithing to Halbeath line will deliver benefits, some of which have been mentioned.

Although we do not currently have a plan to open a railway station at the Halbeath park-and-ride site, we remain committed to improving access to the Scottish rail network. When I attended the opening of the site, with local council representatives, the issue of the station was raised. In response, I pointed out the availability of the £30 million station investment fund. I suppose that, like Annabelle Ewing, I anticipated that a proposal would come forward.

Such a proposal really has to be discussed first of all with Fife Council and the local regional transport partnership, which will have to go through the Scottish transport appraisal guidance process to consider whether a rail halt is a priority and a good investment. We do that with all our rail investments. It is not enough simply to say that we should have a station; it has to be evidenced by a proper study.

To those who wish to have a station at Halbeath, I suggest—as we suggest in any such situation throughout the country—that, as a first step, they discuss the proposal with the regional transport partnership, which in this case is SEStran. In turn, SEStran can assess the proposal in line with its local and regional transport priorities. If SEStran wishes to progress the proposal, it will undertake a STAG appraisal. That work will first identify whether there is a need for improved transport connectivity in the area and, if there is, consider all potential transport options objectively, and not just rail. That is not to say that it would not be rail, but it has to be clear that rail is the best investment. That is the route that I would recommend that the promoters of the idea take.

Our commitment to railways is reflected in the £5 billion package of funding and investment until 2019, which will support major projects and improvements to infrastructure.

The impact of the next ScotRail franchise was mentioned. Next year, we will have two exciting franchises in operation. The specification for the ScotRail and Caledonian sleeper franchises underlines the Government's commitment to providing enhanced rail services throughout Scotland. We are keen to see improvements throughout the network to ensure that rail is competitive with travel by car.

Our desire for improvement relates to all aspects of the journey experience, including improvements to the passenger environment, on-board services and service frequency, as well as journey time reductions to and from our major cities.

Our record of investment in transport is substantial and stands for itself. I am proud of the investment that we have made and will continue to make. I underline what is perhaps an obvious point, which is that an efficient transport network in Scotland creates employment and stimulates growth, which in turn creates conditions of advantage and opportunity, allows business access to a skilled workforce and enables businesses to deliver goods and services to market.

On the central point about the development of rail services, I reiterate that discussion with SEStran and the council would be the first port of call.

Meeting closed at 18:08.

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