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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 3 June 2014

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 3 June 2014

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Dr Federico Luzzi, outreach and knowledge transfer officer with the philosophy department of the University of Aberdeen.

Dr Federico Luzzi (University of Aberdeen): I have been asked to say a few words about the value of philosophy.

Philosophy invites us to think about some difficult and important questions. To be honest, it also invites us to think about some difficult and not-so-important questions. But always when doing philosophy, we ascend to higher-order thinking: we think about what we think and why we think it. In this way, philosophy serves to continually challenge the views we hold, whether they are reasonable or the result of bias, prejudice or preconception.

While completing my studies, I became interested in the educational value of discussing philosophical questions in groups outside academia. Since then, I have facilitated those discussions with primary school children, school teachers, prisoners, ex-drug users and the general public. I have discovered just how powerful an educational resource such discussions are. That should not be surprising, as studies have demonstrated the intellectual benefits for primary pupils who take part in weekly group philosophy discussions, including higher IQ and greater self-confidence.

It is helpful that many philosophical questions presuppose no prior knowledge. They can be explained to a six-year-old in 30 seconds. For example: do we have an obligation to help people in need, even distant people we have never met? What justifies punishing criminals? Is there a morally significant difference between doing harm and allowing it to happen? The lack of a received view—even experts disagree on central philosophical questions—shifts the focus on to participants, who are encouraged to express their views and justify them with reasons.

I have seen philosophical questions stimulate dazzlingly creative thinking among participants of those group discussions, thinking that is nevertheless regimented by a critical stance. Philosophy, after all, is not a subject where

anything goes; whatever is said must be backed up with plausible arguments.

What I find even more important are the social benefits. Doing philosophy in a group setting teaches us that, on difficult issues, there may be several reasonable views other than our own, that disagreement is to be expected and tolerated, that, nevertheless, some views do not stand up to critical scrutiny and should be rejected, and that figuring out what we ought to think about difficult questions is a process best done with others, through discovering, comparing and assessing all available views. Consequently, I think that philosophy is valuable: not just for academics and teachers, not just for primary school children, prisoners and ex-drug users but for everybody. Thank you.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-10194, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to today's business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 3 June 2014—

after

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Jim Clark Rally Incidents—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Dementia Care

1. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to address the matters raised in the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland's report, "Dignity and respect: dementia continuing care visits". (S4T-00723)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I welcome the Mental Welfare Commission's report on dementia continuing care that shows that the level and quality of care and support are, in many cases, not meeting the standard that we expect. Although we are making significant progress in many areas of dementia care, such as diagnostic rates, post-diagnostic support, and acute hospital care, it is essential that people who have dementia receive safe, effective, and high-quality care at all stages of their illness and in all care settings, whether that be at home, in hospital, or in residential care. The standards of care for dementia in Scotland, which were published in 2011, make clear that everyone has a human right to such care. We continue our national approach to workforce development and education, to support services in meeting the standards.

At national level, action is under way in a range of areas to address many of the issues that are highlighted in the report, particularly through national commitments to improve care in specialist national health service care facilities and to reduce the inappropriate prescribing of psychotropic medication for people with dementia.

We will work with the Mental Welfare Commission, Alzheimer Scotland and others to consider, carefully but rapidly, other matters that are highlighted in the report, and to develop an action plan. The report reminds us all that dementia is now and will be in future one of our foremost public health and societal challenges.

The integration of health and social care will enable more people with advanced dementia and more complex care needs to live well and for longer in their own homes, reducing reliance on long-term care in specialised and continuing care units. We work with services throughout Scotland to support that aim.

Roderick Campbell: In "Scotland's National Dementia Strategy: 2013-16", commitment 11 is,

"We will set out plans for extending the work on quality of care in general hospitals to other hospitals and NHS settings",

and commitment 13 is,

"We will finalise and implement a national commitment on the prescribing of psychoactive medications".

The MWC report expressed major concern about the prescription of psychotropic drugs without regular review. What steps will be taken to ensure that commitments 11 and 13 are met?

Michael Matheson: On commitment 11, work is being taken forward that is focusing on how the dementia standards are applied in the acute hospital setting, particularly in NHS wards and units that have a key function in providing assessment, care and treatment to people with dementia. The intention has been that, on completion of that work, the approach will be rolled out to non-acute settings such as continuing care units, which are often in community hospitals. We are considering how to speed up the process of rolling out the approach in the continuing care setting, which the Mental Welfare Commission highlighted in its report. We will consider how to take work forward as part of the action plan that responds to the report.

On commitment 13, the strategy sets out clearly that there is a need to reduce the unnecessary use of medication in all care settings and that medication should be regularly reviewed and updated. At its most recent meeting, the dementia strategy implementation and monitoring group considered commitment 13 and agreed on the approach that should be taken in implementing that aspect of the strategy.

We will liaise with the Mental Welfare Commission, Alzheimer Scotland and others on how we can ensure that commitment 13 is implemented as quickly as possible, so that we can be assured that individuals receive medication appropriately and that their medication is regularly reviewed and properly recorded.

Alongside that, as part of the action plan I will consider what further action we can take to ensure that sufficient work is being done to introduce activities that can reduce the need for medication for individuals in such settings.

I hope that I have reassured the member that work on the commitments has started and that we intend to consider how to speed up the process of implementation.

Roderick Campbell: The Mental Welfare Commission referred to a disparity in the provision of continuing care beds across Scotland's NHS boards. How does the Government propose to attack that disparity?

Michael Matheson: NHS boards will differ in the number of continuing care beds that they have, for a variety of reasons. For example, a health board that has a greater focus on

supporting and providing care in the home and community setting might not have as many continuing care beds as a board that has a greater focus on in-patient or residential beds. There can be a variety of reasons for the disparity.

The member will be aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing made a statement to the Parliament recently in which he set out plans for care provision in Scotland, which include consideration of the number of continuing care beds in Scotland and policy on the provision of such beds. Work is on-going to develop the guidance in this area and to look at the specific number of continuing care beds that we have in Scotland. Once that process is complete, we will be able to set out the national approach to the provision of continuing care beds in NHS boards across the country.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the detail that the minister has given on a number of aspects of the very worrying report from the Mental Welfare Commission, which is almost as bad in some areas as the Bridgend report in Wales, which led to significant action by the Welsh Government.

The minister has given details on a couple of issues but there are so many others in the report. I therefore press the minister to accept that the Government should provide time for a full debate so that we can look at the things that are not going right. I acknowledge that Scotland is ahead in terms of dementia standards, early diagnosis and early support but, clearly, we have severe problems in relation to the most severe cases—as illustrated by the report—and we need to have a full debate on the matter.

My reading of the report is that, frankly, if the Care Inspectorate had done the report, it would have closed some units and said that there should be no further admissions in some others until the situation was improved. We do not yet have an adequate on-going inspection system—four years between reviews by the Mental Welfare Commission is not good enough.

Michael Matheson: I recognise the member's acknowledgement that Scotland is broadly ahead in the way in which it delivers dementia care, but the report highlights a significant area that needs improvement and further action. As I mentioned in my response to Roderick Campbell, I have asked officials to develop an action plan that is specific to the report recommendations. Of the 20 report recommendations, three are specific to the Scottish Government and we accept all of those.

I want to have not only an action plan but a monitoring and implementation approach to ensure that the work is driven forward at a local level, where delivery bodies have a responsibility

to do that. I hope to have that action plan by the end of the month. That may be an appropriate opportunity to hold a full debate on the matter. I am more than happy to take away the member's suggestion on that.

With regard to the inspection regime issue, the report highlights that many—in fact, the vast majority—of the carers who were interviewed were satisfied with the care that was being provided to their relatives. However, that sends a signal that there are issues with people's expectations for such care. I will consider how we can best address that issue, because it is clear that a number of units have not been providing care of an adequate standard. The carers should have been aware of that and should have been able to alert the appropriate agencies to look into the situation. We have to look at the issues in the round, and consider how we can ensure that carers are better informed about what they should expect of the care that is provided to their relatives.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): When the Scottish Government published "Scotland's National Dementia Strategy" in 2010, it promised to adopt the principles of the charter of rights that was produced by the cross-party group on dementia. Does the minister agree that the report demonstrates a failure to adhere to the charter and in particular to the principles of accountability and empowerment? The fact that most dementia sufferers are going for longer than a month without getting fresh air is a disgrace. There are simply not enough staff receiving dementia-specific training.

Michael Matheson: The report highlights a number of areas in which the level of care for individuals with dementia and the way in which it is delivered have been unacceptable. Some basic standards of care have not been met, and that is not to be tolerated.

The 2010 strategy set out the broad areas in which we required improvement, which included the need to sign up to a rights-based approach. As I mentioned in my opening response, I believe that there are human rights issues for the individuals concerned, particularly where they are being prescribed medication that may be inappropriate, and those issues must be addressed. The updated strategy that we published last year seeks to drive that agenda further forward. We recognise that there has been a broad improvement in the way in which services for individuals with dementia are delivered in Scotland.

As Richard Simpson said, Scotland is seen as a world leader in a range of areas in delivering dementia care. We need to ensure that we take appropriate action in the areas in which deficiencies have been identified to deal with the issues robustly and as swiftly as possible. The action plan that I have requested from officials is

intended to drive that work forward and to monitor how action is implemented effectively throughout the country.

Jim Clark Rally Incidents

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Kenny MacAskill on the Jim Clark rally incidents. As the cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

I call Kenny MacAskill. Cabinet secretary, you have up to 10 minutes.

14:15

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I would like to make a statement about the fatalities that occurred last Saturday near Swinton in the Borders during the Jim Clark memorial rally.

I know that the whole chamber will wish to join me in expressing condolences to the families and friends of those who were killed or injured. The three spectators who died were John Leonard Stern, aged 71, from Bearsden; Elizabeth Allan, aged 63, from Barrhead; and her partner, Iain Provan, aged 64, also from Barrhead. Above all, our thoughts are with their grieving families at this difficult time. It is important now that we give the bereaved not only all possible support but the time and privacy to grieve in peace and to make their funeral arrangements.

The two casualties who were transferred to Edinburgh royal infirmary are continuing to receive on-going care there. One is in a satisfactory condition, and the other remains in a critical condition. We all hope and pray that they will both make a full and speedy recovery from their injuries.

Just after 4 pm on Saturday afternoon, a rally car left the road at the Swinton section of the Jim Clark rally and collided with a number of spectators. Three people died and one was seriously injured. One casualty was later evacuated by air ambulance to Edinburgh royal infirmary. Earlier the same day, at around 2 pm, another rally car left the road during a different stage, injuring six people. All six were taken to the Borders general hospital for treatment, and one of those injured was also subsequently transferred to Edinburgh royal infirmary.

The incident has come as a tremendous shock to that Berwickshire community and to the wider motorsport family. All across Scotland and far beyond, people are sharing the sadness of this tragic event and stand ready to offer whatever support they can.

As the First Minister said on Saturday, this was desperately sad and difficult news for the Borders. People out for the weekend to enjoy their

motorsport and to remember the achievements of one of the world's great racing drivers did not return home. That was the tragic outcome of this year's rally, and it was an outcome that shocked us all and which will live with us for years to come.

Saturday was a black day for the rally, for the Borders and for Scotland, but we must and will learn lessons. We need to understand what caused Saturday's fatalities and ensure that the tragic events in the Borders help us make future rallies safer.

Yesterday, the Lord Advocate and I went to Kelso to receive a briefing on Saturday's tragic events from Police Scotland and Scottish Borders Council. We were briefed on the event, the incidents, the emergency response and the spectator safety arrangements. At the weekend I also spoke to the leader of Scottish Borders Council, David Parker, about the incident, and I have met with the council's chief executive.

All three emergency services—Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Ambulance Service—as well as the national health service and Scottish Borders Council were involved in the immediate response to the incidents, and Police Scotland family liaison officers have been deployed to support the next of kin of the deceased. I would like to thank everyone who assisted in the response to these terrible incidents.

A full police investigation into the circumstances is now under way under the direction of the Crown, and a Police Scotland major investigation team is in place. Primacy lies with the police investigation. The decision on whether to hold a discretionary fatal accident inquiry is for the Lord Advocate alone, as is any decision on whether criminal prosecution is appropriate.

The Jim Clark memorial rally, which began on Friday, is a hugely popular annual event in the Borders and is attended by thousands of spectators over three days. This year's rally commenced in Duns on Friday 30 May, moved to the Kelso area on Saturday and was due to conclude at Duns on Sunday.

Following the second incident, the Jim Clark Rally executive committee, Scottish Borders Council and Police Scotland took a joint decision to abandon the rally, and the final stages that were scheduled for Sunday were cancelled.

Scotland has a strong tradition and a great history in motorsport. Jim Clark's name is up there alongside those of Sir Jackie Stewart, David Coulthard and the McRae family. The legacy of those sporting heroes is immense and has been proudly continued by the likes of Dario Franchitti, Allan McNish and Paul Di Resta.

It is a fitting tribute to the late Jim Clark that the rally in his name has taken place in the Scottish Borders since 1970. It is the largest rally in the United Kingdom—some 250 competitors take part in it—and it is the only rally on the UK mainland that takes place on closed public roads. It includes many special stages over its 310 miles.

The Jim Clark Rally Ltd is a company that is owned by the organisers—Berwick & District Motor Club Ltd and Border Ecosse Car Club Ltd. The rally is organised by the Jim Clark Rally executive committee, with assistance from Scottish Borders Council and the British rally championship, and it is one of seven rallies on the 2014 British rally championship calendar. The rally is organised in conjunction with the Motor Sports Association, which is the governing body in the UK. It is responsible for the governance and administration of all major forms of motorsport in the UK, and it controls the technical and sporting rules across the various disciplines. The association's chief executive, Rob Jones, has said that, once the police investigation has been concluded, the incident will be the subject of full inquiries by the association to ensure that any lessons are learned to assist in the constant drive to provide the highest possible safety standards at all motorsport events.

I know that the Jim Clark rally is a long-standing event that has been part of the local community for 44 years and that it has a good safety record. It is a hugely popular event that has brought enormous benefit to Berwickshire year after year.

The Scottish Government receives an annual report from the organisers. That process allows a review to be carried out of the effects of the rally on the ground of public safety to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward for the future. The legislation that governs the rally was passed in 1996. It provides that ministers may prohibit the holding of the rally or permit it, subject to certain terms and conditions. In the light of Saturday's events, the Minister for Transport and Veterans will give careful consideration to the public safety aspects of the 2015 rally and the need for conditions. The decision that is taken will be dependent on the information that comes forward from the safety review of the event.

We have had discussions with Police Scotland about the need to review spectator safety more generally. The longer days are with us and we are moving into an unprecedented summer of events. With that in mind, I think that it is appropriate to review safety at public events and to do so speedily. Across the country, there is a busy calendar of events and a huge amount of careful planning has already been done.

Although, as a closed-road and unticketed motor rally, the Jim Clark rally is unique, the

Scottish Government will ask Police Scotland to work with event organisers and local authorities to undertake a health check of event planning for events that will take place this summer. That will ensure that robust safety regimes and risk assessment procedures are in place and that licensing conditions are being met. Police Scotland has undertaken to carry out that review over the next four weeks.

Spectator safety must always be paramount. In the light of the deaths at the weekend, the Scottish Government will commission a review of motorsport event safety in Scotland, for which it will draw on safety experts and the knowledge and expertise of the motorsport community. The review will also include Scottish Borders Council, Police Scotland, the Motor Sports Association, event organisers and other key stakeholders. It will include a review of the training and deployment of stewards, as well as all other safety-related controls. The Scottish ministers have the power to impose conditions on the rally, and the Minister for Transport and Veterans will wish to have sight of the review of motorsport event safety's recommendations before a decision is made on whether to impose such conditions.

Sadly, Scotland has seen human tragedies at sporting events in the past. We have come through those traumatic events, learned the hard lessons and acted on them so that, for example, our major sports stadia are now far safer for large crowds of spectators. That can be of small comfort to those who grieve today, but it is a process that is necessary and important.

Again, on behalf of this Parliament and this country, I extend our deepest sympathies and condolences to the families of all three victims.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wish to ask a question would press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight today of his statement. I associate Scottish Labour with the sentiments that he expressed during the statement on this terrible tragedy. No doubt there are pressing questions that we would all like answers to, but I realise, as will many in the chamber, that we must await the outcome of the police inquiries. Nevertheless, can the cabinet secretary tell us who will lead on the longer-term Government review of motorsport event safety and what timescales he envisages for reporting back to the chamber?

Kenny MacAskill: We are currently inquiring as to who wishes to come on board with the review. I have made it clear to the chamber that we intend it to be a wider review that will include local authorities and those involved in motorsport. We are seeking to obtain some expert advice, but Government ministers will, through their officials, ultimately be in charge.

Obviously, we will have to await the availability of information necessary to those involved in the review, so it is difficult to be precise about the timing. We have to ensure that the appropriate information is available—that it can be released by the police and the Crown. It is certainly the intention to undertake the review as expeditiously as possible, but that must be balanced with the need to make sure that we get it right.

In light of the manner in which the member asked his question and made his contribution, I can give him an assurance that we will be more than happy to engage with other political parties as well as the broader stakeholders to ensure that primacy is given to the police and the Crown and that events—such as an FAI, although that is for others to decide on—can take place. However, at the same time, we want to get on with the review to make sure that motorsport, which has provided benefits to Scotland, can continue in a manner in which we can ensure that the safety of those who go to watch it will not be endangered.

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of his statement.

As the cabinet secretary said, our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families and friends and those who are still in hospital. We should also think of the spectators and marshals who witnessed the horrific scenes on Saturday afternoon.

Clearly, it is welcome news that a full investigation will be carried out. However, I caution against any knee-jerk reactions in how we respond to the tragedy. The rally is a long-established event in the Borders, and although everyone is shocked by what happened at the weekend, it would be regrettable if any premature decisions were taken about the event's future.

Can the cabinet secretary assure me that there will be close co-operation with the Motor Sports Association, the Berwick & District Motor Club and the Border Ecosse Car Club to ensure that any additional controls are realistic and achievable in order to allow the continued running of this and similar events?

Kenny MacAskill: I can give Mr Lamont the assurance that there will be no rush to judgment. As Mr Pearson indicated, those who are charged with carrying out the investigation will do that. In

the wider review, we will ensure that those with skills and expertise are brought on board to be part of it.

Mr Lamont made a valid point: as I said in my statement, Scotland has a proud history of success in motorsport, and there are those, too, who have simply participated, spectated and enjoyed it. The Jim Clark rally has run for 44 years without any previous tragedy, so we must ensure that we do not rush to judgment. However, we must also ensure that lessons are learned and that, once available to us, they are implemented.

I assure Mr Lamont that those who are involved at the coal face will be part of the discussions, which will involve not just the operators of the Jim Clark Rally Ltd but, more important, Scottish Borders Council and other councils in Scotland. Although the input and contribution to motorsport of the Borders—including, not least, those of the late Jim Clark—have been significant, many other areas in Scotland welcome and benefit from motorsport.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, extend my condolences to all those who have been affected by this tragedy. Is the cabinet secretary aware of why the rally continued after the first accident and whether any consideration was given at that time to cancelling it?

Kenny MacAskill: That matter was raised with the Lord Advocate and me. The rally has a joint agency basis and there is a safety committee that includes not just the Jim Clark Rally executive committee but Scottish Borders Council and Police Scotland. After the first incident, an investigation or inquiry was made by all those organisations, which came to the conclusion that it appeared to have been due to a mechanical error and that there was nothing intrinsically wrong with the site. It was on that basis that the rally continued. It appears that full consideration was given by all those who are involved in the safety committee and that the first incident was not related to the subsequent incident. It appeared to relate to a mechanical failure on the vehicle and was nothing to do with any safety-related aspect of the route.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I join others across the Parliament in expressing condolences and wishes for the speedy recovery of those who were involved in this tragedy. I ask the cabinet secretary what advice is to be given to spectator events this summer, including such things as on-road cycle events, while the health checks and the broader review that he mentioned in his statement proceed.

Kenny MacAskill: I welcome the member's contribution. That is clearly something that the Government and particularly the cabinet secretary for sport and the Commonwealth games are very

concerned about, and that is why we have engaged with Police Scotland. We have no reason to believe that there is anything untoward, and many of the events have already been properly scrutinised not simply by the police but by local authorities. After discussion with Deputy Chief Constable Iain Livingstone, however, it has been made clear that Police Scotland will carry out an investigation over a period of four weeks and report back. As I said, they already believe that there has been proper scrutiny and there is no cause for fear or alarm, but having seen what occurred at the weekend, I think it is right and proper that a quick review is carried out to provide as much assurance as we can that those who will go to events in coming weeks, whether those events are large or small and whether they relate to cycling, motorsport or anything else, can be assured that they will be as safe as they can be.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I, too, extend my condolences to an area that I used to represent and that part of the Borders. I agree with the cabinet secretary that this is not a circumstance in which a mandatory FAI should be held, but I respectfully suggest to the Lord Advocate—I know that he is not here, but he will hear this—that we must have an FAI and that, given that they take so long, it should be done expeditiously.

Kenny MacAskill: The member is quite correct. It would be a discretionary FAI. The Lord Advocate has taken a special interest, travelling down yesterday not only to be briefed by the council and the divisional commander and gold commander at the time, but to visit the locuses. It will be for him to decide, given the discretionary aspect, but I think that I can assure the member that the Lord Advocate will seek to deal with the matter as expeditiously as possible and he is giving it his personal attention.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I am sure that all our thoughts are with the victims of this tragedy and their families. I understand that a motorsport safety code exists and that the programme for the event made reference to it. Will the review of motorsport event safety that the Scottish Government is commissioning include the way in which the code is disseminated to spectators and volunteers at events?

Kenny MacAskill: The member makes a valid point. Some of those aspects will come out in the investigation and indeed in any FAI, but they have to be reflected on and reviewed. It is for that reason that the review that we are setting up will include those who have expertise but also others who can perhaps bring a fresh perspective to ensure that the expertise is as up to date as it can be and that it takes into account all appropriate

criteria including information that comes to light in the investigation. I think that I can give the member that assurance.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for the statement. Our thoughts, too, are with the relatives and friends of those who tragically died on a day when they should have been enjoying their sport, and with those who were injured. It is appropriate to acknowledge those members of the emergency services who had to deal with the tragedy.

The cabinet secretary was correct to say that this was the 44th Jim Clark rally. We know that the rally brings in an annual local spend of £3.3 million, but safety and the protection of life must be paramount. Is now an appropriate time to look at the resourcing of stewards and spectator safety at rallies? Will he support counselling for those who might have traumatic stress after this tragic event?

Kenny MacAskill: The member raises two issues. As he suggested, the matter is one of balance. I agree. We require to learn and take on board the lessons. We must balance the great enjoyment of the rally, its benefits and prestige and its income benefits to the community with public safety, which must always be paramount. Lessons will be learned.

My colleague Paul Wheelhouse has already spoken to me about post-traumatic stress disorder, on which I am happy to engage with Scottish Borders Council. The issue might not be for Victim Support Scotland, but other resources are available. We will engage with the council and other agencies on what can be done. I have no doubt that some people who were present saw the tragedy unfold before their eyes, and they might well require treatment.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, associate myself with the condolences that my colleagues have expressed. I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement.

I am the convener of the cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness, which has previously considered road safety and safety in leisure and sporting activities. Many of the group's members will have been directly affected by this tragic event.

At this early stage, are there indications of the key lessons to be learned about accident prevention and safety awareness? How will those lessons be imparted to professionals and the wider safety community?

Kenny MacAskill: We intend the lessons to be imparted through the review group, whose report will be made available. Police officers and specialist road traffic officers have been at the

scene. The Motor Sports Association will take part in the on-going investigation. We must leave it to those who have expertise to ensure that the site is properly examined. As I said, time was taken to ensure that the bodies were removed with dignity.

Lessons are being learned and the circumstances are being looked at by those with many years' expertise. I confirm to Clare Adamson that, once the lessons from the experts have been learned, they will be imparted. The Administration will expect those lessons to be taken on board by all who are responsible for running and organising such events.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): My family business had a motorsport division that entered and won rally races across Scotland, so I share the dismay of all those who love motorsport in Scotland. I add my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives—particularly the West Scotland constituents from Barrhead.

The cabinet secretary is right to say that the event has an exemplary track record, but the code that many people observe arose from tragedies that occurred, albeit many years ago. As well as looking at what fresh safety advice might be required, will those involved look at whether complacency might have grown because of the absence of accidents in recent years? The existing advice is robust, but it needs to be properly implemented to ensure safety at such events.

Kenny MacAskill: The member makes a fair point. For that reason, the review will not concentrate simply on the Scottish Borders. We are aware that a tragedy occurred up in the north of Scotland at a motorsport event just a year or so ago. Lessons must be learned in every locality.

I cannot speculate on whether there was complacency, but I can say that the Motor Sports Association and those who run the Jim Clark rally are deeply shocked and are willing to co-operate. We intend to learn lessons, to ensure that they are taken on board and to ensure that Police Scotland, local authorities and event organisers properly implement the appropriate lessons.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I, too, add my condolences to the affected people. Will the cabinet secretary provide further information on the response to this terrible incident by the emergency services on the day?

Kenny MacAskill: I thought that the response was outstanding. Obviously, Police Scotland was there and was involved in the organisation. The fire and rescue and ambulance services were also there. Many events, such as music festivals, and sporting events, such as the rally, have great crowd safety implications. Plans and preparations are always made, we hope, and in most instances they do not require to be implemented. It is clear

that Police Scotland was on the scene at the time of the second incident, and all parties agreed that the rally should be cancelled forthwith. That allowed the fire and rescue and ambulance services and, indeed, Scottish Borders Council and the police to do their job. Again, I put on record my gratitude and thanks to those who dealt with what must have been a very distressing incident. Although doing that is their job and what they are trained to do, it must have been very distressing to have to deal with three fatalities as well as the consequences.

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): The review may well result in additional responsibilities relating to sporting events being placed on local authorities—for example, in relation to risk assessment and safety procedures. Can I get an assurance that the Scottish Government will fully fund any such duties?

Kenny MacAskill: It would be premature for me to rush to judgment. I know how Scottish Borders Council welcomed the rally and equally I know about its consciousness of safety. It welcomes the rally because it provides good fun, which many of its residents contribute to and participate in, and it also brings a great deal of benefit into the local community. It is not a matter of pounds, shillings and pence: we cannot put a price on those whom we have lost. Every organisation—national or local government, council or private consortium—has an obligation to ensure that public safety is paramount. No price can be put on that.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary assure us that there has been or will be full engagement with the local community and that its views about the future will be taken into account?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. That is why, on Sunday, I phoned the leader of Scottish Borders Council and, on Monday, the Lord Advocate and I met its chief executive and members of staff. That liaison and relationship will continue. We appreciate that what happened has deeply affected many local people. That is why arrangements have been made so that those who wish to pay tribute or lay flowers can do so. We will work with Scottish Borders Council and the health service in the Borders to do what is necessary to support the local community as well as the families, throughout Scotland and elsewhere, who are grieving.

Air Passenger Duty

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-10185, in the name of Keith Brown, on air passenger duty. We have a wee bit of time in hand, so we will be slightly generous if members take interventions.

14:43

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): I welcome the opportunity to come to the chamber to restate the strong case that we have set out for control of air passenger duty coming to Scotland.

As members will be aware, our proposals for APD enjoy widespread support, including from Scotland's airports and a growing number of airlines. Our case for Scotland having control of APD is based on the facts. Scotland has a decent return from its European network, but we continue to play catch-up in relation to longer-haul international connectivity. Our strategic approach is to work with our airports to entice more direct international services, but also to improve connectivity to hub airports where we have to do that.

There have been some notable successes recently. Edinburgh's new routes to Chicago and Doha are prime examples of the results of airports and the Government working together to secure success, but those successes have happened despite the current application of APD. Scotland's airports are absolutely clear and unanimous that APD is a barrier to further success.

I believe that what Scotland has to offer places it in the tourism heavyweight bracket, but it is clear that APD is having a severe impact on the ability of our tourism industry to punch at its proper weight. The rationale is straightforward: more direct international flights make it easier to attract more tourism to our country and increase our share of that vital market.

A stark illustration of the effect of the burden of air passenger duty is that, together with other burdens such as VAT, the United Kingdom as a whole, despite the excellence of our cultural offerings, is rated by the World Economic Forum as the 139th least competitive tourism country from a list of 140. The country occupying 140th place is Chad. Our tourism industry is geared for success and has unmatched natural and human resources to work with but, when a family of four travelling to Scotland from North America are presented with an excess of £276 on their air fare, other parts of Europe can start to become a better alternative.

Changes were announced in the last UK budget, which I will touch on shortly, but research work that was conducted in 2012 estimated that increases in APD rates between 2007 and 2011 could result in a loss of 2.1 million passengers to Scotland's main airports every year by 2016. The same report concluded that, in the five-year period from 2007, rates for short-haul flights had increased by around 160 per cent and for long-haul flights by up to 360 per cent. In 2014, the figures now stand at 160 per cent and 385 per cent respectively. There can be no justification for that rise. Furthermore, a separate piece of independent economic modelling that was carried out in 2013 concluded that abolishing APD could provide the UK with a short-run increase in gross domestic product of almost half of 1 per cent, rising investment and employment and a permanent boost in GDP into the medium term.

It is worth thinking about the effects of APD in increasing carbon emissions. Many people now fly to Dubai via Dublin because flying directly from Scotland costs more as a result of APD. Some people are adding an environmentally damaging short-haul flight, which means that APD is working against our climate change targets.

For some time, APD has been at the top end of the most expensive aviation duties in Europe, with significant annual rises bucking the European trend. Indeed, there appears to be a growing realisation among our European neighbours of the negative economic impact that air passenger taxes can have. For example, the Irish Government abolished its €3 airport travel tax in April. It is also worth saying that the APD in the UK is the most expensive tax of its kind in the world. We could compare the effects of that change in Ireland with the reduced offering at some Scottish airports.

We should not forget the importance to the economy of our airports in their own right and the vital importance of their success. They are major employers in their areas, directly and through contractors. For example, Glasgow airport employs more than 400 staff directly, while contractors and service providers boost the indirect figure to 4,500. We therefore need to recognise that successful airports are catalysts for economic development, and we should do everything that we can to support that ambition.

There are some misgivings on Opposition benches, but our strong desire for Scotland to have control of APD is not based on the idea of power for the sake of power—it is based on a problem that we have identified, that is widely observed in the industry and which was recognised by the Calman commission in June 2009. The UK Government has had ample opportunity to deal with the issue, but it has

chosen not to do so. The Calman commission suggested that, if air passenger duty was devolved, it should also be devolved to Northern Ireland. It has now been devolved to Northern Ireland, but no adequate explanation has as yet been given for why it has not been devolved to Scotland.

For some time, it has been apparent that UK Government aviation policy has been Heathrow-centric. Heathrow's captive market makes it easier to charge APD at whatever rate suits the Exchequer. I have long argued that regional airports do not have that luxury and have drastically different capacity and demand issues. It is therefore just common sense to acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all policy will not work. The UK Government appears to have only partly seen the merits of that argument, in relation to Northern Ireland.

The recent changes in the UK budget betray the UK Government's singular focus. The reduction from four bands to two represents a tangible and immediate benefit for existing and soon-to-be-introduced long-haul services. With that in mind, it would be no surprise to see the current direction of travel continue, whereby Heathrow looks to optimise its restricted capacity by encouraging more long-haul services at the expense of regional ones. When APD is charged on both sectors of a domestic service, the disincentive to airlines is clear. The continuing squeeze on our Heathrow connections and the barrier to enhanced international connectivity that APD has provided comprise something of a double whammy to passengers.

The UK budget changes could, in theory, add more potential to our future discussions with the Chinese and other long-haul markets, but they have little impact in the present. Our airports do not have direct scheduled services that fall into the upper two bands for which the rates are being reduced. The managing director of one of our larger airports told me recently that the changes affect around 4 per cent of his business. The impact at Heathrow and Gatwick will be much more significant, of course.

Recognising the need for quick but considered action, our commitments for APD in "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" deal with the short-term and the future. We are committed to a 50 per cent reduction in the first term of an independent Scottish Parliament with full abolition when public finances allow. The proposal is Scotland focused and does not have to reconcile unintended consequences at Heathrow and other large UK airports—something that continues to be an insurmountable challenge for the UK Government.

Those proposals are recognised as radical but absolutely necessary for the position in which we find ourselves. The industry shares that view. Scotland's airports have been supportive of APD control coming to Scotland for some time. Indeed, one of the airlines, Flybe, called today to say that it wished us all the best in the debate and hoped for widespread support among the Opposition parties.

The Scottish Chambers of Commerce and other business organisations agree. Willie Walsh, the chief executive of British Airways's parent group, suggests that APD would be dealt with more progressively in an independent Scotland, and the UK Government would be well advised to listen to that.

I also note Ruth Davidson's previous position that APD should be abolished and the Liberal Democrats' position on federalism. We have the grounds for some consensus in Parliament, but the picture is quite confused. I understand that despite the fact that no action has been taken on the recommendation of the Calman commission—which the Conservatives supported—Ruth Davidson felt it necessary to restate her support for the devolution of APD, although that has since been contradicted by a report in *The Guardian* today. She has also mentioned that she sought the abolition of APD from David Cameron, who refused point blank.

When a vital change that even the Conservatives agree should happen is dismissed out of hand by the UK Prime Minister, it is a perfect example of why we must have independence in Scotland. Perhaps later in the debate we will get some more certainty about the Conservative position.

On the Liberal Democrats, we had a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland saying that devolution of APD would happen but, lo and behold, it has not happened. Perhaps we can get some clarity from the Liberal Democrats on that and on how they reconcile their refusal to move on the devolution of APD with their position on federalism.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

The minister asks for clarity. Perhaps we could have some clarity from him. Yesterday, we learned that the Scottish National Party proposes to increase benefit for carers by £58 million. Given that that was not included in the page of costings in the white paper, will he tell me whether that policy comes before or after APD in the queue for money?

Keith Brown: A request from me for clarity from the Liberal Democrats evokes a response asking for clarity about a childcare policy. Perhaps Alison McInnes could use her own time to answer the

question that I asked rather than avoiding it in the way that she did.

The Labour Party position changed dramatically between April 2013 and March 2014. Originally, Labour proposed to support the devolution of APD, but that has changed in its latest devolution proposals. I do not know what the rationale for that is, but perhaps we can have some clarity on that in the debate.

Those who are not in favour of control of APD coming to Scotland are swimming against the tide. We have laid out the reasons why it is important that Scotland should have control over the tax. The York Aviation study and other studies have estimated the costs to Scotland at around £200 million per year at 2014 levels.

We know that people in South America and North America consider APD. I have been given the example of flights from Mexico. Entire planeloads of people decide to go to Paris or other European capitals rather than come to the UK and Scotland and they cite two reasons: APD and visa controls. That involves real cost because, had those people come to Scotland, they would have spent money in our shops, hotels and restaurants to the benefit of our people. That is no longer happening.

The York Aviation study mentioned a loss of £2 billion to the UK. That is a huge figure and a huge loss. We can boost jobs and the economy and cut back on some of the expensive connecting flights that we currently have to have by having more direct flights. For that reason, I am happy to move the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with concern the continuing prevarication of the UK Government in devolving control of air passenger duty (APD) despite the clear recommendation of the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution in 2009, evidence of the damaging impact of the significant increases in APD since 2007 and the growing campaign for control for it to be devolved; further notes the APD changes that were announced in the 2014 UK Budget, which, from April 2015, will amend the existing four-band system and, as a consequence, reduce duty paid on journeys of more than 4,000 miles; further notes that, based on the international destinations currently served from Scotland's airports, this will be of minimal immediate value to Scotland; believes that improving Scotland's international air connectivity and the ability of its aviation sector to properly compete with global competitors is a matter that needs to be urgently addressed; considers that this would be assisted by control of APD being devolved, and believes that, in the event of a Yes vote in the independence referendum, the UK Government should devolve this as a matter of priority in order to enable the Scottish Government to progress the proposals contained in *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland* to reduce APD by 50% in the first term of an independent Scottish Parliament and to seek to abolish it when public finances allow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): I call Mark Griffin to speak to and move amendment S4M-010185.2. Mr Griffin, you have a generous nine minutes.

14:55

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Another day, another debate on independence. Once again, we are talking about powers and process when we could be talking about reducing poverty and inequality. It is another debate whose end result will be Scottish National Party MSPs voting one way, us voting another way, and not a thing changing in Scotland in terms of transport connectivity.

We have thought long and hard about air passenger duty and we are still unconvinced about removing it. We discussed it through the Calman commission and we have introduced it for debate in our devolution commission and, although we feel that air passenger duty is in need of reform, we believe that a 50 per cent reduction, followed by total removal, would not be sensible without further consideration of the economic and environmental impact.

Keith Brown: Can Mark Griffin say why it was a point of principle for the Calman commission to agree that APD should be devolved? I understand that he might quibble with the proportion by which it is cut, but how has the principle that APD should be devolved to Scotland changed from the conclusions that Labour reached as a result of the Calman commission?

Mark Griffin: The point of principle is that we need to take into account economic assessments and environmental assessments. I will deal with that in my speech but, from first principles, we need to make those judgments and take those assessments into account before we decide where the tax is best administered. We are not closing the door to devolution to Scotland; we simply think that more consideration is required before such a decision is taken. The Scottish Government seems somehow surprised by that, but we do not think that we can remove what is an environmental levy without considering those impacts thoroughly.

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

Mark Griffin: No, sorry.

It is no surprise that the SNP wants that power over tax, since the Government is an all-centralising force in Edinburgh and never misses an opportunity to demand more powers. However, we have to look more deeply at what the Government wants that power for. When we look at those reasons, we see an SNP-Tory alliance. Those two parties propose devolution of air

passenger duty, resulting in tax competition across the UK, with the benefits going to big airlines and the costs being borne by the public purse and the environment. The debate is a mirror image of the one on corporation tax, which sees the Scottish Government pursuing a low-tax economy while claiming that it is a progressive force.

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): What are the views of Mr Griffin and the Labour Party on the York Aviation report, which showed the devastating effect that APD has on Scottish airports, and the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, which went into some detail on the economic advantages of scrapping APD across the UK?

Mark Griffin: The Government has failed to have any assessment of the policy before introducing it. With regard to the papers that the member mentioned, I agree that there would be an increase in passengers coming to the UK, but the member has to appreciate that there would also be an increase in passengers leaving the UK, which would mean that home-based tourism revenue would be affected as well. That is surely the case.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mark Griffin: What is progressive about a tax cut to big business of £135 million through the reduction of air passenger duty, on top of the £385 million that would be given to big business through a cut in corporation tax that would set the level 3 per cent lower than even George Osborne is proposing? That is a tax break to big business of more than half a billion pounds on day 1 of Scottish independence, and there is no answer from the Scottish Government on where the axe will fall on public spending.

Chic Brodie: Will the member give way?

Mark Griffin: Let us look at the detail of the proposal. The Scottish Government has said that the costs of reducing APD could be offset by increased VAT receipts as a result of increased tourism. Of course, that revenue would go to the UK Treasury, and that seems to be the reason why the Scottish Government is not introducing its childcare policy, but we can leave that inconsistency for another day.

It has been indicated that a 50 per cent reduction in air passenger duty would increase passenger numbers by 3 per cent. A 3 per cent increase in inward passengers would generate additional income and tax revenue in Scotland, but would that be enough to offset the £135 million pounds in lost revenue? As I have said, if we were predicting a 3 per cent increase in visitors, surely logic dictates that we should expect a 3 per cent increase in Scots flying out. How much would it cost the Scottish economy and the public purse if

more Scots were to go on foreign holidays rather than stay and visit UK destinations?

I have yet to see any detailed figures produced by the Scottish Government on the likely impact of the policy other than what we know for certain: the public purse would be £135 million pounds worse off. Will the minister say today, in the interests of transparency and ahead of the referendum, which public services would be cut or who would pay higher taxes to fund the policy? Would it be teachers, nurses or the police? Would it be local government or come from care of the elderly services? The Scottish Government can have no credibility on the issue when it has no costings and it is not willing to say where spending will be reduced or taxes increased.

Chic Brodie: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has made it clear that he is not taking an intervention, Mr Brodie.

Mark Griffin: That is not to say that we are opposed to the reform of air passenger duty. However, during any such considerations, the full implications of any reform should be known.

It must also be remembered that air passenger duty was introduced as an environmental levy. The white paper makes a clear commitment to decarbonisation. How are the two policies consistent? The white paper states:

"We will be able to align transport policy with energy policy to achieve Scotland's ambitious decarbonisation targets."

Section 33 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 commits the Scottish Government to reduce carbon emissions by 46 per cent on 1990 levels by 2020, with a further reduction of 80 per cent on 1990 levels by 2050. The Scottish Parliament unanimously backed that target. The act also requires the Scottish Government to hit annual emissions reduction targets and report back to Parliament. Both of the targets have been missed, making the subsequent targets more difficult to hit.

The Scottish Government has also been criticised by Opposition parties and a number of environmental organisations for having too many proposals and not enough policies in its annual report on proposals and policies. Those criticisms include basing long-term goals on vague assertions, such as the availability of new technology in the future.

There is striking similarity between this debate and that report because the Government can offer only the same vague assertions that everything will be okay. There are no costings to consider, no figures on how the environmental impact and carbon reduction targets would be offset, and no

proposals for any reform of air passenger duty to reduce the carbon emissions from air travel.

The debate should essentially be about transport connectivity but instead it is about transport connectivity—as with everything else—in an independent Scotland. I have said that nothing will change after today; we will simply carry on as we were. That would not be the case if the Government were serious about transport connectivity.

We could have been debating the actions and options that the Scottish Government is taking right now to make Scotland a more connected and attractive place to come and visit for business or leisure. The Government could be well on the way to delivering a rail link to Glasgow airport, boosting one of our most important city regions, but here we are again talking about powers and process and a continuation of the Government's independence agenda of tax cuts for big business.

I move amendment S4M-10185.1, leave out from “with concern” to end and insert:

“that reducing air passenger duty by 50% would take £135 million out of Scotland's budget in addition to the £385 million that the Scottish Government's proposed cuts to corporation tax would cost; further notes that these reductions in revenue would have to be fully funded by tax rises or cuts to vital public services; calls on the Scottish Government to confirm immediately what tax rises or public service cuts it would introduce in an independent Scotland, so that the people of Scotland can make an informed decision on 18 September 2014, and further calls on the Scottish Government to hold a serious debate on transport connectivity.”

15:04

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I start from a position of enormous advantage in the debate, because I was brought up to believe that all tax is evil. My experience of a career in politics has tempered that only slightly; I now believe that tax may be a necessary evil, but it is evil, nonetheless.

Occasionally, a tax comes along that causes everybody to round on it and attack it because of the damage that it is doing. Air passenger duty is exactly that kind of tax. It is therefore no surprise that we find ourselves debating APD once again, having debated it on 20 November 2012.

To be perfectly honest, not a great deal has changed in the interim. One of the things that has not changed is the fact that the SNP is still desperately quoting the York Aviation report. The only difference is that the report has, a year and a half down the line, been demonstrated to be out of date and unworthy of our concern.

Nevertheless, I will go into some more detail on the report. It claimed that by 2016 increases in rates of air passenger duty could result in

2.1 million passengers being lost to Scotland and that £210 million less would be spent in Scotland per year by inbound visitors. It also suggested that the initial doubling of APD in 2007 had had the effect of reducing the number of passengers by 1.2 million across the country. It predicted that the knock-on effect of APD would be that the Scottish economy would lose

“inward investment, trade and competitiveness.”

However, the figures that have been produced since show that, in 2013, Glasgow airport handled 7.4 million passengers. That figure is up from 7.2 million in 2009 and bucks the trend that was predicted in the York Aviation report. Edinburgh airport had 9.2 million passengers, which was up from 9 million in 2009. The figures appear to indicate that there is a growth trend. That trend is at its greatest at Aberdeen airport, which handled 3.5 million passengers in 2013, compared with only 3 million in 2009. It therefore appears that, even given the recession that we have gone through, the predictions in the York Aviation report have not materialised.

Nevertheless, I found myself agreeing with a great deal of what the minister said in his opening speech about the economic impact of taxation.

Colin Keir: Given that Mr Johnstone is a fine, dyed-in-the-wool Tory, does he not agree—based on his own political judgment in the past and so on—that the change of ownership at Edinburgh airport and competition might have helped to improve the figures?

Alex Johnstone: There we go. There is an example of a positive contribution being made from outside Scotland.

Let us now look at what we are saying about the tax, what it was meant to do and the effect that it is having. Of course, we all know that it was initially proposed as a green tax. It was meant to tax people who were travelling by air and who were, as a result, polluting, but it is now simply considered to be a revenue-raising measure. Nevertheless, we should never make the mistake of believing that taxing people out of the air is likely to have a positive effect on the environment because—as we all know—not only have passenger numbers increased in recent years, but predictions that airlines would not invest in new cleaner aircraft have turned out to be wrong. The result is that the emissions from our aircraft—especially when they are measured per passenger—are dropping very quickly as fleets are renewed and efficiency is improved.

A key aspect of that is that larger aircraft will tend to use hubs. As a result, we in Scotland will rely—as we always have—on feeder services to the major hubs, and cannot hope to bring all those services directly into Scotland. The consequence

is that we must concern ourselves not only with the air passenger duty that is being paid in Scotland, but with that which is being paid in London.

So, as I stand here, I am willing to hold out the olive branch and say “Yes—the Calman commission said that air passenger duty should be devolved.” Yesterday, the Conservative Party published the Strathclyde commission report, which sets out what we are prepared to do in the event of a no vote. It is a detailed document that goes into—at great length—the generous proposals for devolution that we will have, in that event. The SNP is getting most excited about one small part of it—the part that said that we would like to see the devolution of APD. However, the SNP misses the point that even if APD were devolved and we were to abolish it all—not just the 50 per cent that the SNP has committed to during the lifetime of the first Parliament of an independent Scotland—the only way that we could properly rid Scotland of APD would be to abolish it on a United Kingdom basis, so that Scottish passengers would not have to pay it at the London end as well as the Scottish end.

Chic Brodie: Why is it okay to give Northern Ireland powers to reduce APD, but not Scotland?

Alex Johnstone: The irony of Chic Brodie’s position is that he takes the place of the unionist: the man who looks from the centre and believes that everything should be equal in all directions. I take the position of the politician who believes in devolution: I believe in different solutions for different countries. That is why I—as a true devolutionist who believes in decision making right here in Scotland—am prepared to propose that we, as two political parties, with so much that separates us, reach out and link hands, and go forward together for the benefit of Scotland and its air passengers, in order to secure, in the long term, a sound commitment that the burden of this evil tax will ultimately be removed so that we do not have to suffer it any longer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Gosh!

Alex Johnstone: I move amendment S4M-10185.1, to leave out from “with concern” to end and insert:

“the recent changes announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which simplify air passenger duty (APD), reduce the charge on flights to countries over 4,000 miles from the UK and cut tax for millions of passengers to and from many emerging markets; notes the findings of the Commission on the Future Governance of Scotland, which was chaired by Lord Strathclyde, regarding the devolution of APD in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to find a viable alternative to the air route development fund.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have six minutes, or thereby, Mr Harvie.

15:12

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): How do I follow that? I can only reflect that I must have been raised with a fundamentally different understanding of the word “evil” from Alex Johnstone. I was raised to understand that the decisions that we make collectively to provide the public services that we all depend on, the investment that we make in the future, and—I hope—our struggle towards a more sustainable economy, are profoundly to the good. Nothing could be further from the truth than to call that kind of approach “evil”.

Given that starting point, I have a great deal of sympathy for Mark Griffin’s arguments not just about whether cutting APD would be a good or bad change in aviation and transport connectivity terms, but about how it would be paid for. Labour and the Greens have reached agreement on the Government’s approach to corporation tax, and the same argument applies to APD; if the Government wishes to cut a tax, it must say whether that revenue will be replaced by revenue from other taxation or be cut from the budget.

Chic Brodie: This is the question that I wanted to ask Mr Griffin. The Netherlands got rid of APD because although it was raising €250 million, the country was losing €750 million in tourism and VAT. Why would we have to replace the tax?

Patrick Harvie: If we stop raising a tax, less income will come to the public budget, so cuts will be have to made somewhere.

To answer the question of whether cutting, or even abolishing, air passenger duty is a good idea, we have to begin with an acknowledgement that the aviation industry already enjoys massive tax breaks, compared with other transport modes. Since the “Convention on International Civil Aviation” in 1947—there have been many European Union directives and EU-US trade deals since then—the aviation industry has paid no fuel duty, while every other transport mode pays some tax on its fuel.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will Patrick Harvie take a very brief intervention?

Patrick Harvie: No, I need to move on. I have taken one already.

Aviation is covered by VAT, but it is zero-rated in this country. Consumers pay no VAT on tickets, airline fuel is zero-rated, and no VAT is due on the purchase of new aircraft, aircraft servicing, air traffic control, baggage handling, aircraft meals and many other aspects of the industry.

Can we figure out the value of the massive tax breaks to the industry? The assessment of the UK Government, with which I do not agree on many

things, is that if the UK was to charge fuel duty and VAT on tickets, it could result in revenues of around £10 billion. That estimate is from 2008.

I am not suggesting that it is something that one country can do unilaterally, or that the changes would be effective if one country were to embark on them unilaterally. However, we need to begin with acknowledgement of the scale of the tax break that the industry enjoys.

Is taxation through air passenger duty too much of a burden to bear and is it holding the industry back? I do not think so. I have had a look at recent increases. In 2013, Aberdeen airport apparently had the busiest year in its history, and beat its record high from before the economic downturn by having 3.48 million people pass through. Glasgow airport has enjoyed its busiest year since 2008 after 7.4 million people passed through its doors in 2013, which was a 2.9 per cent increase. Edinburgh airport, which has been mentioned already, was used by 9.8 million people or thereabouts in 2013. That was an increase of 6.3 per cent, which beat the global average increase in the aviation industry, most of which is happening in rapidly developing countries. The industry remains very expansionist.

The airline industry is also very profitable. Just a few days ago, the published forecast global profit is in excess of £10 billion. European airlines made £240 million profit in 2012, £300 million in 2013, and the amount is projected to rise to £1.7 billion in 2014.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It is fascinating to hear those figures, but could Patrick Harvie express them in terms of percentage profit?

Patrick Harvie: What we can see from European airlines is clearly a large percentage increase from £240 million to £300 million and then to £1.67 billion in 2014. The industry is clearly still expanding and is highly profitable, and it enjoys massive tax breaks. That is my starting point, and I find it hard to take a different view.

What would be a fair contribution through taxation for the industry? For me, it must be related to the social and environmental impacts of the industry on noise and traffic on the ground, as well as the impacts of carbon dioxide, which are higher, given levels of emissions at altitude. In its briefing to members, ABTA says:

“ABTA accepts that aviation should pay its proper environmental cost”

but it quite laughably goes on to say that it

“believes that cost is more than reflected in the current APD levels. This is particularly true with the introduction of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS)”.

which only covers 25 per cent of aviation emissions in Europe.

This is an industry that makes a far lower contribution through tax than other transport modes, and which has a far higher impact on climate change because of its emissions. Keith Brown's argument that short-haul flights are more environmentally damaging is exactly the spurious rationale that was given for the air route development fund, which saw continual increases in long-haul as well as short-haul flights.

The assumption that underlies the industry's argument and the Government's position is that aviation can just keep growing while the rest of society aims for dramatic carbon dioxide cuts. I do not think that the industry can be given a free ride for much longer.

I move, as an amendment to motion S4M-10185 in the name of Keith Brown, to leave out from first “notes” to end, and insert:

“considers that the aviation industry does not pay its fair share of tax; notes that European airlines expect to make profits of over £1.5 billion in 2014 but will pay no tax at all on aviation fuel and benefit from significant VAT reductions in the UK; considers that the cost of air passenger duty is a small fraction of these tax breaks enjoyed by the industry, and believes that the aviation industry is a highly profitable industry that is failing to pay for the pollution that it creates and should be taxed in line with its environmental impact.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches should be up to seven minutes, please.

15:19

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): APD illustrates much that is wrong with the Westminster Government—not just the current Government, but the institution itself. There is a good Scots word to describe it: thrawn. The case for reducing or abolishing air passenger duty has long since been made. It is a proverbial “no-brainer”. That is not my word, but the word of Mike Cantlay of VisitScotland. There is no case at all to be made for a tax that acts against the public interest while depriving the Exchequer of revenue.

It has long since been shown that reducing APD will more than pay for itself through increased tourism and associated visitor spend, through increased VAT and an increased take from the whole basket of taxes, and through job creation and reduced welfare costs. As if that is not enough, reducing APD will pay for itself by increasing our competitiveness and increasing business, and by increasing our global connectedness and associated trade.

Scotland, unlike the rest of the UK, is increasingly an exporting economy. We export our oil and gas and our oil and gas expertise. Our oil

and gas supply chain earns more money internationally than it does in the North Sea.

Patrick Harvie: Mike MacKenzie is making the case that reducing or abolishing APD would have a beneficial impact on the rest of the economy. All the oilmen would be flying all over the world; that would be great. However, it would clearly have a cost to the Scottish budget. Cannot the member understand that reducing a tax means that the money must be found somewhere else in the Scottish Government's budget—even if, as he says, there is a benefit in the wider economy?

Mike MacKenzie: I am surprised that Mr Harvie does not properly understand the nature of taxation. Sometimes we give away with one hand to collect much more in the other, from the whole basket of taxes. Virtually every tax in the basket will deliver an increased take.

Patrick Harvie: That is Laffer curve nonsense.

Mike MacKenzie: If I may continue, Mr Harvie.

We also export food and drink. Exports in the sector have increased by 55 per cent since 2007 and are worth £5.4 billion. The target is to achieve exports of more than £7 billion by 2016.

In pursuing our exporting success, we contribute greatly to the UK balance of trade. Of course, the UK Government does not like to talk about that, because without Scotland's exports the UK will face balance of trade difficulties; without Scotland's exports, the UK trade deficit would double. That is one reason why UK politicians, despite their posturing, will be pleased to enter a currency union with Scotland after independence.

Successful participation in the global economy requires travel. In the modern world, that means air travel. Quite simply, there is no other way to do it. Tourism brings in more than £4 billion a year to the Scottish economy, a significant proportion of which comes via air travel. It makes no sense to throttle our trade with the rest of the world, to stifle our tourism potential and to limit our economic potential by imposing air passenger duty.

No doubt that is why the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution and, as I understand it, the Tories' Strathclyde commission, recommended that APD be devolved to Scotland. No doubt that is why the Liberal Democrats' home rule report, "Federalism: the best future for Scotland", which was published in October, recommended devolution of APD.

As usual, the UK Government is too slow, too dumb and too deaf to listen to the compelling case that has been repeatedly made for devolving the tax.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Mike MacKenzie said that abolishing the tax is a no-

brainer and he said that we would make up every penny and more in other taxes, so why does he not favour immediate abolition upon independence?

Mike MacKenzie: I am very glad that Gavin Brown asked that question because, of course, we cannot just pull on that lever and suddenly get a tax windfall the same day. It takes time. *[Interruption.]* It takes time. That is why, sensibly, the Scottish Government has pledged to reduce the tax to 50 per cent immediately on independence. Thereafter, as taxes from other parts of the basket of taxes roll in—pour in—to Scotland, ultimately we will abolish the tax completely. I am sure that Mr Brown agrees with me that that makes good economic sense.

Of course, it is for those reasons that the aviation industry, all those who depend on it and, increasingly, people across Scotland, are indicating their support for independence.

15:26

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): It has been guesstimated that by 2016, if nothing is done to tackle APD, this damaging measure will have cost the Scottish tourism industry and our economy some £210 million per annum over a four-year period by virtue of lost inbound tourist spend. We do not have to look far in seeking tangible evidence of the positive impact that reducing such taxation can have. Ireland has just scrapped its equivalent of APD and expects 1 million more visitors to come annually as a result.

On the back of the move, Ryanair has opened up 21 new routes in and out of Dublin, Shannon and Knock, which is not only advantageous for visitors but affords the Irish themselves greater scope for travel, not to mention opening up potential new business opportunities. And there is the rub for Scotland: we are not competing on a level playing field, or one even remotely resembling that, with one of our closest tourism rivals—rivals with whom we are going head to head in the areas of golf and heritage tourism, particularly in the United States market. Of course, independent Ireland already had an advantage over us, having reduced its VAT rate on tourism—as 25 other European nations have done—a little over two and a half years ago.

The latest move makes it even harder for our industry to take Ireland on. Right now, we are trying to participate in a competitive marketplace with one hand tied behind our back. Despite the Scottish Government's pleas, the UK Government has steadfastly refused to look at the VAT issue, decisions on which, as with APD, can be taken only by Westminster.

The Irish national tourism agency, Fáilte Ireland, commissioned a report on the impact in the first two years of the reduction in VAT from 13.5 to 9 per cent; I mention that partly to answer Patrick Harvie's point about the budgetary impact. The report showed that tourist numbers in Ireland were up; that 10,000 jobs had been created across the industry; and that the tax take from those in employment and from tourist spend in the economy more than made up for the income that the Irish treasury surrendered through the cut.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member give way?

Graeme Dey: I want to develop my point. Approximately €95 million in total came from additional income tax, social welfare savings and tourism spend, as against a drop of €88 million in the country's VAT receipts. Ireland's reduction proved to be a winning move, and so will its abolition of APD, even though duty there was already pitched at a far lower level than it is in the UK.

As any of us who fly will know, the cost of taking to the skies to and from the UK is grossly inflated by APD. The hit is bad enough on short-haul flights, but for long-haul flights it really is punitive. Although the Westminster Government plans to tinker with APD in 2015 by pegging the charge for all flights exceeding 2,000 miles at £284 for a family of four, the negative impact on the Scottish economy and on our airports of continuing to levy APD at such levels could go beyond the obvious.

Even factoring in the cost of a connecting return flight over the Irish Sea, it is much cheaper to fly from Dublin to some destinations that Edinburgh serves than it is to fly direct from Scotland's capital. I will give three examples involving three different carriers, flying to Philadelphia, New York and Paris in July this year. In the case of Philadelphia, there is a saving of £184 to be made; for New York, the saving is £404 per flight; and for Paris, it is £30 per flight, despite the fact that Edinburgh is closer than Dublin to Paris.

Unless the issue is tackled, either by having APD devolved or by securing control of it through independence—which is the more desirable option by far—we could be facing a bleak time of it, with Scottish holidaymakers snubbing direct flights from this country in favour of cheaper alternatives to be had elsewhere. I do not want Scotland to operate as some sort of regional hub, linking people into London or Dublin; I want Scotland to develop more in the way of comparably affordable direct flights and to properly exploit its potential as a first-choice tourism destination.

Ryanair's Michael O'Leary has predicted that the full abolition of APD would double the number of visitors to Scotland over five to 10 years. I accept that we are not talking about full abolition,

but even a 50 per cent reduction, moving towards removal of the tax when the public finances allow, would allow much of that potential to be realised.

The Westminster Government might be planning to abolish two bands of APD for journeys in excess of—

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): The member's proposal for the partial abolition of APD would take £135 million out of the Scottish budget. What areas of the budget would he cut to replace the shortfall?

Graeme Dey: I thank the member for teeing that up. Labour's amendment claims that a 50 per cent cut in APD would remove £135 million from an independent Scottish Government's budget. What about the positive, and countering, impact that such a move would have? The PricewaterhouseCoopers report from last year suggested that if APD were abolished across the UK as a whole, that would generate the equivalent of 0.46 per cent of UK GDP in a year, rising to at least £16 billion within three years, leading to the creation of 60,000 jobs. I am no economist, but I think that that suggests that tackling APD would be a pretty good thing, especially if it were married to considering VAT in the tourism sector, too.

Who knows? People from the north of England might just start to travel to an independent Scotland to catch flights from here, rather than the present situation, which is quite the reverse. If an independent Scotland were to reduce and, ultimately, scrap APD, as the UK remained on its present path, the boost to our airline sector and our economy could be significant.

Scotland-based travellers would surely support our airports instead of heading south in pursuit of a saving, and some travellers from over the border might be tempted north by cheaper fares.

We need action on the issue, and it needs to go beyond simply devolving APD. Scotland needs control of the measure, as it does over every other power associated with a fully independent country.

15:32

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): We have heard from the minister, as well as from Mike MacKenzie and Graeme Dey, about the economic factors behind air passenger duty, but I wish to take this opportunity to concentrate on the environmental aspects of the debate, as well as on the role of air travel in general transport connectivity.

My Labour colleague Mark Griffin has already argued that the benefits of devolving air passenger duty at this stage still need to be assessed. I do not intend to go into those arguments again.

The SNP plans are to abolish the duty “when public finances allow”—whenever that may be. Frankly, that seems somewhat simplistic and rather disingenuous. We do not currently have any information on the carrying out of detailed research into the economic and environmental consequences, which we need to understand the full picture of what the Scottish Government is saying about both the proposed 50 per cent reduction and what would happen later.

As I have already highlighted in many debates, as have other members across the chamber, the Parliament voted to pass the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill in 2009, committing us to reducing carbon emissions by 46 per cent by 2020, I think, and by 80 per cent by 2050. As the Scottish Government has been made all too aware by stakeholders outside the Parliament—and as my colleague Mark Griffin highlighted—that is no easy task, as members from all parties across the Parliament acknowledge. Our targets are the most ambitious in the world and are difficult to achieve, but the long-term benefits of cutting greenhouse gas emissions were recognised by all parties, which led to the present Government—and those that will follow in the future—committing to taking the issue of climate change very seriously and developing policies accordingly.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Claudia Beamish: No, I will not take an intervention, sorry; I am developing what I want to say.

It is the pathways that matter, and they are complex and difficult for us all. As such, I am struggling to understand how cutting APD, which encourages more air travel, is compatible with reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I am sure that the minister does not need me to point out that air travel produces one of the highest levels of emissions of any global sector, so why is the Scottish Government aiming to cut the tax?

Keith Brown: The member has concentrated on environmental issues, but I think that she would acknowledge that, since 2007, there has been a 12 per cent reduction in transport emissions in Scotland. She will also be aware that we intend to spend £1.3 billion on environmental measures between 2013 and 2016. Is it the position of the Labour Party that, on principle, it does not support the devolution of APD to Scotland? That is not clear from what has been said so far.

Claudia Beamish: The minister has asked a number of questions. We are looking at that possibility. My colleague Mark Griffin has already highlighted that there are economic and environmental issues that need to be assessed

before we take a final decision. That has been made clear.

Has the Scottish Government assessed what increase in air travel there is likely to be as a result of a cut in APD? Has it considered the increase in carbon emissions that would be created and how that would be offset? As Patrick Harvie highlighted, the aviation industry receives major tax breaks. In its white paper, the SNP announced its intention

“to align transport policy with energy policy to achieve Scotland’s ambitious decarbonisation targets.”

That is a commendable goal, to be sure, but it surely sits uncomfortably with the SNP’s stated aim of using the revenues from oil—part of the fossil fuel mix—to provide much of the economic support for a potentially independent Scotland and with the proposed cut in APD.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Claudia Beamish: I will not, as I am just moving on to a new point.

We should surely be encouraging people to fly less—whenever that is possible, I stress—instead of creating another needless incentive to contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. I am afraid that the Scottish Government’s position is somewhat hypocritical. That has been a running pattern: it is forever making grand pronouncements on environmental issues while pursuing policies that contradict its intentions, whether in relation to North Sea oil and energy or the marine environment. In my view, there is a danger that the word “sustainable” will be lost from the Scottish Government’s policy of sustainable economic growth.

In any case, the focus on air passenger duty is something of a red herring; instead of concentrating on one aspect of the transport sector in isolation, we should be considering transport connectivity as a whole. Last week, we heard about the new Caledonian sleeper franchise and how it will greatly improve rail connections to London. The opportunities to further develop rail travel to mainland Europe should also be considered.

Of course no one is saying that all air travel should be discouraged. Most non-domestic journeys, especially intercontinental ones, require air travel, but the proliferation of intercity flights in the UK could be tackled by making the case for more rail travel. That said, no one has yet acknowledged the importance of the exemption from APD for the Western Isles, to some parts of which it would not be realistic to travel using means other than air travel.

I hope that members agree that it is fair and sensible to consider connectivity in the round. Sometimes, it can take just as long to get to major cities in the UK from Edinburgh by flying as it does going by rail. I know from having googled the cost of many train journeys and having found that they are not necessarily affordable for people that cost is one of the main reasons why people choose to fly.

We need to think laterally. Is the Scottish Government working with VisitScotland to encourage families to consider holidaying in Scotland instead of flying abroad? I must put my hands up and admit that, occasionally, I fly abroad. Instead of looking at APD in isolation, as we are doing in today's debate, we need to look at all these issues in the round.

The SNP has made the bold assertion that it will abolish APD when the public finances allow. Has that policy been properly weighed up against the economic and environmental impact, or is it yet another example of the SNP holding in front of people and businesses something that it says would happen after independence—we will never know—without having it properly costed?

15:39

Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): Few things bind those within and outside the aviation industry together more than their hatred of APD. The campaign called a fair tax on flying is an alliance of over 30 airlines, airports, tour operators and destination and travel trade associations who are all calling on the UK Government to make UK aviation tax fairer. When we add to that group people of the same mind about APD, such as those in chambers of commerce—for example, Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce—we see that the opinion that there is something wrong with APD is shared widely.

APD was introduced in 1994, I believe on the back of being an environmental tax, but it is certainly not that now; it is just a tax—nobody claims that it is even close to being an environmental tax. It started off at just £5 for short air journeys and £10 for going elsewhere. Now, of course, the UK has an APD rate that a World Economic Forum report of last year stated was the world's highest.

We have seen over the past couple of years the publication of the PWC report—incidentally, it was written by people who used to work in the UK Treasury—and the York Aviation report that was commissioned by Scottish airports. As Mr Johnstone pointed out, Scottish airports have had some pretty good figures, which are in spite of APD and come from a demand for more direct flights. Investment in the airports is due to the hard

work of the people who run them, who are looking for route development. We have had success in Scottish airports from that, but we could do even better. As the MSP whose constituency includes Edinburgh airport, I believe that it is a driver for the economy. Everyone in the business sector accepts that. We need to encourage the airport, because we need jobs and to get the economy moving, and we can do that through the aviation industry.

Given what we have heard so far from a number of people, we can see the economic difficulties that those in the aviation industry are faced with. I have explained that in terms of Edinburgh airport. Indeed, as the minister pointed out, Saad Hammad, the chief executive of Flybe, has commented:

“Across the aviation industry, scrapping Air Passenger Duty would not only incentivise airlines to provide new routes and enhance travel for Scotland's passengers, it would also significantly boost business and the economy. Scottish business people and consumers have had to count the cost of paying this tax twice when travelling domestically to an English airport — a disproportionate financial penalty which must not be allowed to continue.”

That shows that it is not just us who criticise APD. I know that operators in the Airport Operators Association, which is UK wide, and particularly those in the north of England, in Newcastle and Manchester for example, are all saying the same thing about APD, which is what makes the comments that some members of the Labour Party have made today even more worrying. I am sure that they will be sending shivers down the backs of those in the aviation industry, because it is looking for support. That simple fact is evidenced by the comments of many people in the industry.

As has been said, Scottish business people and consumers generally have had to count the cost of paying the APD tax twice. The crux of the matter is that we in Scotland have a geographical and airport hub problem that means that we end up paying APD twice.

APD is nothing more than Westminster's demand for a tax; as I have said, it is not a green tax. It is a constant source of amazement that so far the Chancellor of the Exchequer has failed to respond to the pleas of business leaders such as Richard Branson of Virgin Atlantic, Willie Walsh of British Airways, Carolyn McCall of easyJet, Saad Hammad of Flybe and Michael O'Leary of Ryanair to stop trying to make their businesses uncompetitive in an incredibly difficult market.

And uncompetitive they are. Competition is not just between carriers and airports but between nations. As the minister mentioned, a family of four from here going on holiday to Florida would pay £276 in APD, whereas an equivalent family in

Germany flying to the same destination would pay £154. As Graeme Dey pointed out, the Republic of Ireland has scrapped the APD tax. Scotland was promised by the Calman commission that APD would be devolved to it. APD got devolved to Northern Ireland in an attempt to make it more competitive with Dublin. What difference is there between Belfast versus Dublin and Belfast versus Glasgow? We are talking airplanes here.

APD has put Scotland at a competitive disadvantage, but Westminster demands to hold on to it and it appears that the Labour Party, having seen a bit of merit in the devolution of powers, is no longer terribly happy—

Gavin Brown: Just thinking through Mr Keir's example, I ask him how making it cheaper for families to go to Florida would help the Scottish economy.

Colin Keir: I would have thought that the complete infrastructure of business is relevant, including travel, ticketing, services that are provided and the amount of money that people may well spend with their families as they are waiting on a flight. Basic stuff like that is part of the business. People make money from those things, and taxation comes out of that.

The Tories now appear to be mildly supportive of APD but, as the minister pointed out, the article in *The Guardian* seems to suggest that the leadership in the Treasury in London is completely against it, so I am sorry if I take what was said in the launch the other day with a pinch of salt. I do not believe that there has been much in the way of expectation that any of the better together parties will provide relief for travellers in the event of a no vote.

APD just does not work. It hurts the travelling public, it hurts businesses and it hurts Scotland more than any other part of the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask you to draw to a close, please.

Colin Keir: Unlike some people who have a lot of money, ordinary people save for months to take their family on the holiday that they want to take, and they are penalised because of APD. Why on earth should they be taxed for that? Just to travel through London, we end up paying double.

APD is also a barrier when it comes to airports vying for new routes.

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

Colin Keir: Not just Scotland, but the south-east of England pays the penalty for APD through the quantity of direct flights won by those here in Scotland. The sooner we get the power and have

APD under our full control in a full independent nation, the better.

15:47

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): If any one matter or any one tax illustrates and confirms that the Westminster coalition inhabits—and its predecessors inhabited—the economic madhouse, APD is it. In 1993, the then Tory chancellor Ken Clarke said:

“I need to raise revenue, but to do so in a way which does least damage to the economy.”

He went on:

“I propose to levy a small duty”—

I stress the word “small”—

“on all air passengers from United Kingdom airports. This will be set at £5 for departures to anywhere in the United Kingdom ... and £10 for departures to other destinations.”

Now, it is £340 for a family of four to visit Australia. He went on:

“There will be exemptions for transfer passengers and ... most flights between the Scottish islands will not bear tax.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 30 November 1993; Vol 233, c 933-4.]

When the new duty was announced, the Tory Government argued that it was most unlikely to have a big impact on sales of flights. In a written answer, the then Paymaster General—and he was a general—Sir John Cope stated:

“Overall, the tax is expected to reduce demand for air travel by around 2½ per cent.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 19 January 1994; Vol 235, c 641W.]

It brings to mind Burns:

“Hey Johnnie Cope are ye wauking yet,
Or are ye sleeping I would wit.”

One thing is for sure. We have been sleepwalking into an unmitigated disaster for an important element of our economy, our jobs, our tourism and our vibrant air industries, as the tax has grown over the past 20 years of Westminster management. Never mind the Tobin tax on financial transactions; here we have the Topsy tax. The Calman commission was right to say that we should have had powers over APD and the UK Government is and was wrong.

Alex Johnstone: The member mentioned the Calman commission. Will he remind me of the extent of the SNP's engagement with that?

Chic Brodie: I say to Mr Johnstone with all good will that Aristophanes said that a man may learn wisdom even from a foe. The rationale is that Scotland would have made it clear that it was looking for full independence and not a halfway house.

The situation affects not just Scotland but the UK Exchequer. Patrick Harvie was right to talk about the effect on climate change aspirations. None of the conversations that have emanated from the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Treasury has meaningfully considered fuel efficiency or the need to move to modern aircraft. The same duty rates apply to very old aircraft.

There is a clear lack of a long-term strategy, which I believe will mean that Heathrow is almost paralysed, as Gatwick and Stansted will be at peak times. Airports elsewhere can and would fight for international direct routes to mitigate that. I say with meaning that that would be much better than losing London as a significant international hub. However, the law of diminishing returns has never been a shining feature of the UK Treasury's economic management.

No one diminishes the taxing time for our airports. I welcome the recent decision about Prestwick, but I want all Scotland's airports to flourish, as they can under their professional management, in what I believe will be a growing economy. Passenger departure taxes such as APD erode the economy and airlines' profitability, which affects jobs in airlines and airports, not to mention the enjoyment of customers who like to go to Florida—I say that to Gavin Brown.

Such taxes have applied across Europe, but the Netherlands, Denmark and now Ireland have abolished them. I wanted to make the point to Mr Griffin—there might have been confusion when I raised it with Patrick Harvie—that the Netherlands canned APD after one year because the €250 million that it brought into the economy was losing the Netherlands more than €700 million in tourism and VAT income. Tourism there is prospering again.

Some European countries still levy air passenger duty, but none has had the 165 per cent increase that we have seen and felt in the UK since 2007. Nowhere does that resonate more than in Scotland. I know that the Opposition parties will rail at what I say, because many of their members have developed the unique skill of proposing nothing and opposing everything, but if they want an illustration of how Scotland's economy could benefit from independence, APD provides the perfect canvas.

Scotland's major airport managers and the associated airline managers—the professionals who are involved in the industries—unanimously agree that we should set off on a journey to reduce and eliminate the Topsy tax. To improve our exports in knowledge transfer, trade, competitiveness and tourism—that is an export activity—and to ride with the punches of global competition, we need more direct and international connectivity, which is vital for business. By the

way, that also indirectly helps the rest of the UK's economy. London and the south-east could choke if we do not do something about limited air transport capacity.

James Kelly: Will the member take an intervention?

Chic Brodie: I am sorry—I am in my last minute.

With the Presiding Officer's agreement, I will not dwell on the likely negative impact on Scottish expenditure and jobs if Boris's fantasy becomes a reality—it really is fantasy island.

In the significant area of international tourism and business, as in many other areas, Scotland is increasingly diverging from London and the rest of the UK. For the economy, and with jobs at the heart of our approach, we need at least to be able to develop a competitive advantage where we can. We would rather do that than whinge about the situation. The independent ability to reduce and eliminate this iniquitous tax would allow us to share the investment and the motivation to create the jobs that we all want.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I am afraid that you must close.

Chic Brodie: I am just finishing.

What I described will come about only with the sovereignty of independence. It will then be up to others outside to meet the economic challenge that we will introduce, which I suspect will be in their economic interests, too.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I believe that members were advised that they could have up to seven minutes for their speeches. That is all that is available for members.

15:55

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): From listening to this debate, I am not sure that the Scottish Government's arguments have progressed much beyond those in the debate back in November 2012. I wonder whether there is a wee bit of motivation to try to embarrass members of other parties—possibly even people who admitted at that time that there was a case for the devolution of APD, such as me. I will certainly not deny what I said at that time, but there are issues that need to be counterbalanced with that.

I will illustrate with a local example some of the problems and the difficulty that there could be with having two different regimes in the United Kingdom.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: No. I would like to illustrate some of the problems with my local example. I am sure that, if Kevin Stewart was speaking, he would have a local example that he wished to use.

For my constituents, airports in the north of England are as accessible as those in the central belt of Scotland, and they are probably more widely used. In fact, passengers can take a train directly into Manchester airport from Lockerbie or from Dumfries, Annan or Gretna by changing at Carlisle. There has been a long-cherished wish in the Solway basin to have Carlisle airport opened to passenger flights. Unfortunately, that aspiration was disappointed in March this year, when an application for the development of Carlisle airport was overturned in the High Court after a challenge from a local farmer. Nevertheless, the Stobart Group still hopes to bring forward another application, which it hopes will result in daily passenger flights to Dublin and London. Obviously, if that aspiration is eventually realised—I accept that it has been discussed for many years without there being much significant progress—it could really open up additional tourism potential for Dumfries and Galloway.

If it is unfair that passengers who go to and from Scottish airports may have to pay air passenger duty twice if there are no direct flights from those airports—I made that point in the debate back in November 2012—it is equally unfair that passengers who travel to and from airports in the northern parts of England, which could include some of my constituents who cross the border to do that, should have to pay twice. There could be the opposite situation in which people travel from the north of England to Scottish airports. Why should any of us have to pay twice because there is no direct flight from our own airport? Indeed, airports in the north of England and their passengers could be disadvantaged not only with respect to London but with respect to Scotland and Wales under the devolution of APD. The situation is therefore complex.

Our amendment back in November 2012 urged the UK Government to take action to resolve that anomaly, as it disadvantages passengers from airports in Scotland, Wales and the north of England. I am not sure whether that is being addressed by some of the reforms that the UK Government has proposed. Perhaps a Conservative member could enlighten us on whether there are any intentions to resolve that anomaly. Devolving APD at this stage could result in tax competition, as we have heard from Mark Griffin and other members, rather than resolve the wider issues around the way in which the tax operates. The great thing about devolution is that it can be reviewed and refined in the light of experience; indeed, that is happening.

Unfortunately, if we decide on independence, there is no way back if we do not happen to like it.

When the tax was introduced in 1994, climate change was far further down the agenda as a priority. As Claudia Beamish pointed out, the Scottish Parliament passed the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which committed us to a 42 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020, which is only six years from now, and an 80 per cent reduction by 2050. It is important that that act included our share of emissions from international aviation and shipping. That was quite bold, and we recognised that as part of the ground-breaking legislation that we passed. The Scottish Government has missed its annual reduction targets for two years in succession, so we have a problem. We set ourselves targets and did not reach them.

I do not know that APD as it stands is the best way of controlling aircraft emissions, but I do not endorse any approach that is simply about reducing the tax and eventually removing APD altogether without replacing it with some other form of taxation on aviation emissions. Perhaps taxing passengers is not the best way; perhaps there are ways in which taxation could be aimed at companies that use aircraft or fuels that are more polluting. There might be ways in which we could refine the approach, but I do not think that it is correct to take away the tax altogether.

In fact, I recall that, in the debate to which I referred, Stewart Stevenson gave some interesting examples of possible ways to tackle aviation emissions, which related to different types of fuel and so on. Consideration needs to be given to how APD could be reformed, which is what Labour colleagues in Westminster have been urging the UK Government to do.

The Scottish Government says in the motion that it would

“reduce APD by 50% in the first term of an independent Scottish Parliament”.

I am slightly puzzled as to why it wants APD to be devolved only if there is a yes vote in September, whereas previously it wanted APD to be devolved, full stop. That aside, as we have heard, the Government proposal to cut APD by 50 per cent would remove £135 million from the Scottish budget, but we have no indication of where the money would come from. I expect that, as with the proposed £385 million cut to corporation tax, the Scottish Government answer will be that the money would come from economic growth—in fact, we have already heard that.

There is still a problem, however. Gavin Brown got one of the SNP members—I cannot remember which one—to admit the problem, which is that, even in the unlikely event that the Scottish

Government's highly optimistic assertions are correct and there is economic growth, it will not happen instantaneously, but the cuts to the budget will bite as soon as they are implemented. From the start, £135 million would be removed from the budget in order to make it cheaper for Scottish residents to fly off on holiday. We all like a cheap holiday—I do as much as anybody else—so that would be popular, but is it really the best use of £135 million?

If there is £135 million kicking around with nothing to be done with it, might it not be better to use it to invest in our public transport system, which gets people to and from work every day and contributes to economic growth? Alternatively, perhaps it could be used to reinstate some of the rail projects that the Scottish Government has either abandoned or delayed. Those would also contribute to economic growth, and would do it in a sustainable manner.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please draw to a conclusion.

Elaine Murray: Right—thank you.

Unfortunately, the Scottish Government, having included aviation emissions in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, now seems to be retreating rather quickly from action to tackle those emissions. APD might not be the best way to do that but, if the Scottish Government gets rid of APD, will it bring in an alternative green tax to tackle aviation emissions?

16:02

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I find the debate somewhat bizarre because, not so long ago, members from across the chamber seemed to be supportive of the devolution of air passenger duty. In fact, about 18 months ago, I attended an event that was hosted by Tory MSP Jamie McGrigor at which cross-party support was expressed for the tourism industry's call for the demise of air passenger duty. We heard that some folks no longer come to Scotland for trips because of APD.

We have heard from the Calman commission, the Strathclyde commission and the Lib Dems' Campbell commission that APD should be devolved, and Labour's interim report on devolution said that there is a case for APD to be devolved. However, today, we hear from all fronts that they no longer believe that that is the case. I say to the people out there that they should be extremely sceptical of what the unionist parties say on any given thing, because they will inevitably turn that around and say, "No, we don't believe that that should be the case." People should be very sceptical indeed.

Dr Murray has just said that she does not want two different regimes in the United Kingdom, but the reality is that we already have two different regimes, because Northern Ireland has had APD devolved. What is the difference between the north of Ireland and Scotland in that regard?

Let me get back to what people out there actually think. As a north-east of Scotland representative, I get lots of moans and groans about the fact that there are not enough routes from the area and about the costs of flying from there to other parts of the world.

Nick Barton, who was the interim managing director of Aberdeen International Airport for a while, said:

"Numerous studies have spelled out the impact that it is having and we have even seen rival airline bosses standing shoulder to shoulder, united against APD.

At the same time we are working within an industry which is, by its very nature, exceptionally mobile, and airlines looking to serve new markets will ultimately choose other European countries at the expense of Scotland."

We have seen that happen.

Alex Johnstone: Is that not a classic example of how the SNP would rather stand isolated and impotent than work together across the Parliament to achieve our long-term objective?

Kevin Stewart: It is not about isolation at all; it is about creating new international routes so that we can connect with our partners throughout the globe. The isolationism comes from the folks who feel that we have no option but to keep APD powers at Westminster. That creates isolationism; I want internationalism.

Let us move on to the current managing director of Aberdeen International Airport, Carol Benzie, who said:

"What is becoming increasingly clear are the implications of this tax on UK businesses. Put simply APD adds to the burden of running a successful company. 65% of our passengers in Aberdeen are travelling in a professional capacity and ultimately the responsibility for paying APD in each and every one of these cases is being passed back to their employer.

Firms in Aberdeen are connected globally with links in emerging and existing markets. These businesses are paying APD twice if they chose to use a hub airport in the UK, and are taking their business elsewhere in increasing numbers to avoid this tax.

Ultimately APD which we are told is helping get Britain back to growth is actually doing more harm than good."

We should listen to those folks who are involved in the business day to day. Beyond that, we should listen, as I do regularly, to the folks who travel from Aberdeen to all parts of the globe, whose competitiveness is being damaged by APD. As Carol Benzie rightly says, many folk choose to use hub airports elsewhere. They travel to Charles

de Gaulle airport, Schiphol and various other places. They will soon travel to Northern Ireland, I am sure, now that APD will be going from there.

I want there to be fewer short-haul flights to hub airports and many more direct routes from Scotland—from Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Prestwick—to all parts of the globe. That is much more environmentally friendly than having short-haul flights.

Patrick Harvie: If that is the consequence that Kevin Stewart anticipates flowing from the policy of halving then scrapping air passenger duty, why does the Scottish Government's own assessment of the carbon impact show that emissions would rise as a result of the policy?

Kevin Stewart: We all know that short-haul flights have the greatest impact on the environment.

Some folk have pooh-poohed the York Aviation report today. That is a wrong thing to do. That report says that APD is seen as

"a pseudo environmental tax despite the fact that rates take no account of the actual environmental impact of a flight and future plans have never sought to reflect aviation's entry in to the EU ETS in 2012. The new Coalition Government appears to view APD more simply as a revenue raising instrument."

I agree that that is what it is doing. We should have the powers and could do much better with them.

16:09

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I last spoke on APD in November 2012, as many other members also did. There has been an awful lot of talking about it and it is perhaps time that we should think about what Benjamin Franklin once said:

"Well done is better than well said."

It is now time to move from talking about things to actually doing things.

The debate has been quite interesting. I suspect that I could make quite significant common cause with Elaine Murray and perhaps one or two others. However, I want to talk about two things: the economics of the issue and the environmental benefits that might come from a different approach.

I will run through some figures. I have done the calculations on the back of an envelope, so I do not pretend that this is anything like the final word on the subject.

An average vacationer coming on a short haul vacation to Scotland will spend 3.6 nights here. If they spend the average amount of money on a hotel—£120 per night—they will contribute £72 in

VAT. Let us treat that as new tax from someone who would not otherwise be coming. They will probably get a taxi to the centre of Edinburgh from the airport and another taxi back out to the airport, because the kind of tourist—*[Interruption.]* Yes, they might get the bus or the tram. I am in favour of trams. They are on the wrong route, but that is an issue for another day.

The money that they spend on the taxi journeys will contribute another £4 in fuel duty and VAT.

They will have three restaurant meals. At, let us say, £25 a time, that represents a further £15 in tax. We are now up to £91 in tax and we have not yet taken account of the money that they will undoubtedly spend in our shops. When I do my little calculation—capable of being criticised, but based on principles that cannot be argued with—that comes to a tax take, for a new passenger on an average short visit, of something of the order of £150 to £200. The APD is around £20 and, of course, the idea is that removing that £20 charge from everybody who comes attracts new people.

I do not think that there has been enough economic analysis of that subject in the debate so far, and I think that we should consider it further. I do not think that we have reached the end of the story on economics but there is a clear indication that, if you get new people here, you get new tax take. We have to ensure that we get enough new people—

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Stewart Stevenson: I will not, for time reasons and because, as I said, my argument is not complete and comprehensive. I will let the member address his point in his closing remarks.

I think that Patrick Harvie said that all airlines pay no VAT. That is not quite true. In Scotland, the routes from Oban to Coll, Colonsay and Islay, from Kirkwall to the outlying islands and from Tingwall to the islands in Shetland all pay VAT on their fuel, because they burn aviation gasoline rather than aviation turbine fuel. I admit that that is a small proportion of what goes on. To be honest, it does not seem to make very much difference one way or the other. There is certainly a case for considering the way in which we tax airline operating companies.

Of course, the essential thing is that APD is a regressive tax. We charge people the duty and deny ourselves more.

Let us talk about environmental issues. In the previous debate on this subject, I talked about a few such issues. It is fine to talk about the need to have powers over APD, but what we actually need are the powers over the whole picture. If APD is the answer, it is a very silly question indeed.

This would be a crude way of doing it but we could say that turbo prop aircraft will pay less APD per passenger, because they are less polluting, as they burn less fuel per mile and they fly lower, which means that the radiative forcing effect is reduced. If someone is down at the bottom, in an unpressurised aircraft flying little flights around Scotland, their radiative forcing is halved again, and their fuel cost goes down to a third.

We could adopt the Norwegian model. In Norway, many commuter flights are flown in aircraft such as the Cessna Caravan, which is a single-engined turbo prop aircraft—a type of aircraft that, by the way, has a better safety record than multi-engined aircraft. The American Federal Aviation Administration has all the numbers on that. Almost uniquely, the UK will not allow such an operation for our scheduled services in instrument conditions. That would have an environmental as well as an economic benefit; it would also make some routes—from Skye to Glasgow, for example—more economically viable.

APD is part of that; we can do things with it. As I said in my 2012 speech, we could have differential APD for airlines that towed their aircraft adjacent to the runway because, on average, that prevents five tonnes of fuel burn in a 757. Five tonnes of fuel is burned just to get a plane from the stand out to the take-off point: tow them out and save 5 tonnes. APD should be used to encourage airlines to do that: because they need to invest in tow trucks, we give them something in return.

It's not just about gaining APD; it is about having all the policy levers that surround APD. That is a huge difficulty in how the devolution settlement has been constructed and operates. I am not saying that anyone set out to do that deliberately. They did not; rather, they set out with a good and honest heart to construct a settlement, but it does not work. Little bits have been devolved piecemeal, instead of whole policy areas being devolved to allow a proper co-ordinated approach to all the issues in an area.

Let us get APD devolved, because we could use it more imaginatively and for economic and environmental benefit. However, if we also had all the surrounding powers, we could do so much more. It is in that spirit that I say that, whatever the outcome in September, let us get APD. Even in the event of a yes vote, we will still be under Westminster until 2016, and there is time to get the benefits more quickly. A yes vote would, however, guarantee that we would have those powers sooner rather than later, and forever.

16:16

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Most of the debate has been devoted to colleagues denouncing the evils of APD. Mr Johnstone even began his speech by denouncing all taxes as evil. I am happy to disagree on that point, but I am also happy to accept that air passenger duty is a mess and undoubtedly needs to be reformed. However, I am no longer convinced that simply devolving the policy is necessarily the solution.

Part of the problem is that APD was introduced as an environmental levy and as a green tax but it is clear that, as Mr Johnstone, Mr Keir and one or two other members mentioned, APD is simply another tax that is providing revenue. That is a fair assessment and why APD needs to be reformed. After all, aviation's impact on climate change is central to the debate. Transport is the second largest source of carbon emissions and aviation is the most polluting form of transport, as Mr Harvie mentioned in detail. Mr Keith Brown tried to make a fist of the argument that somehow reducing tax and making aircraft travel cheaper would be a green measure, because there would be more direct flights and people would not need to travel via Dublin or Schiphol airports. That argument does not have a great deal of credibility.

Many members have referred to the anomalies in how the tax operates, such as the fact that APD has never applied in the Highlands and Islands and the impact of the changes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Those anomalies argue against the devolution of this tax as the solution, because that would simply result in a race to the bottom. That would amount to the end of air passenger duty but would leave us with no answer to the problem of how we tax air travel in order to compensate for the environmental and climate damage that it does. The problem is not only national but international, so we need to address solutions nationally and internationally, not in smaller and smaller ways.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Iain Gray: Yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can I have Mike MacKenzie's microphone turned on, please?

Mike MacKenzie: I am afraid that I forgot to put in my card, Presiding Officer.

Iain Gray: Can I get some extra time because of the delay, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that there is no extra time. I ask Mr MacKenzie to be quick.

Mike MacKenzie: Will Iain Gray acknowledge the great reduction in emissions and the greater fuel efficiency in aviation over the past 30 years?

Iain Gray: I hope that that is the case. I also hope that the member will acknowledge that the Scottish Government has repeatedly missed its own emissions targets, so it must address how it will reduce the impact of aviation, as well as everything else.

The one thing that we can be sure about, if we cut air passenger duty in half, is the impact on the public finances: £135 million would have to be replaced in order to pay for public services. The argument that that change is cost neutral or even that it will bring in more money makes no sense—if that is so, why does the white paper say that the second 50 per cent can be abolished only when public finances allow? If there is no impact on public finances, we should get rid of it all at once. The Government does not believe that there is no impact, and neither do we.

Keith Brown: Will the member give way?

Iain Gray: No. I am sorry—not after that.

If the concern is that there should be more direct flights from Scotland, it is a concern that we could take more seriously if the Scottish Government had found a replacement for the most successful route development fund anywhere in these islands, which brought in 41 new direct flights and which the Government simply abolished. Flights for Mr Stewart's constituents, from Aberdeen to Stavanger, and flights to Stockholm and Dubai, were all delivered by the RDF. If we were really concerned about business connectivity at our airports, we would not have a Government that cancelled the Glasgow and Edinburgh airport rail links. I say to Mr Keir that the Edinburgh airport rail link could have made the airport in his constituency that he quite properly supports one of the best connected airports anywhere in the world. Indeed, Elaine Murray's constituents might have been able to get a train to an airport in Edinburgh instead of having to go to Manchester or Newcastle, as they do at the moment.

All this is just another proxy for the independence debate. As with childcare, pensions and, as we have seen this week, carers, all this is just another reason to claim that after a yes vote everything would be more and cheaper, and that Scotland would not have to face difficult decisions or the great challenges of our age, be that demographic change or the change in climate. None of that is credible.

Throughout the debate, many have quoted support from industry. For the aviation industry, though, independence is just a proxy for the APD debate. Of course it wants a reduction in taxation. Willie Walsh has made it clear, however, that even

if those changes were to happen to APD, he would not plan to introduce more long-haul flights in Scotland. He is absolutely clear on that. As for Mr O'Leary—I met him years ago when I was a minister; I got on perfectly well with him, which was difficult because he spent the whole meeting dressed as Bob the Builder, for a reason that escapes me—he said this about climate change in Scotland:

"If global warming meant temperatures rose by one or two degrees, France would become a desert, which would be no bad thing. The Scots would grow wine and make buffalo mozzarella."

When it comes to the future of aviation, we need to have a serious debate about Scotland but it should not be a proxy for something else. Perhaps, after September, we can return some seriousness to the debate.

16:23

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I take this debate extremely seriously because Glasgow international airport is a major employer for my constituency. The airport is not fully in my constituency; it is also in Derek Mackay's, and I have been told by the minister to make that painfully obvious to everyone here. The airport is a key employer in our area. It is the gateway to Scotland for many tourists and business people. From a previous life, I know exactly what it is like to try to get from one end of these islands to the other using aviation. Given Scotland's geography, aviation is more important to us than it is to other parts of these islands.

Glasgow airport has 30 airlines, 100 destinations and, as has already been mentioned, 7.4 million passengers a year. Glasgow airport generates £200 million for our economy and it is still the principal airport for long haul. It is also extremely involved in our local community in Renfrewshire. There is the flightpath fund, which covers Renfrewshire, East and West Dunbartonshire and Glasgow. The three key areas that the fund considers are employment, environment and education, ensuring that many groups benefit. It is a valuable part of the community that I represent. In spite of the damaging impact of APD on the Scottish economy, the airport contributes to that community.

It has already been said that a reduction in APD would save Scotland £200 million per year, which is £200 million that we could put back into our economy. That would give us the opportunity to discuss what we were doing about connectivity throughout the world, instead of having to pay APD twice, in effect, by going to one of the hub airports.

Some of my colleagues have mentioned some of the problems down in Heathrow and the turmoil that Heathrow has got itself into with its proposed expansion plans. Chic Brodie mentioned the problems we have with the mayor of London, who has a fantasy idea about having an airport somewhere in the middle of London. We have to look at how we can get connectivity for our businesses throughout Scotland.

James Kelly: As he mentions connectivity and airports, does George Adam now support the establishment of a rail link to Glasgow airport?

George Adam: I say to the Labour Party: let it go. Let it go and let us move on. Glasgow airport is working with the Scottish Government on other ideas regarding interconnection between Glasgow and the surrounding area. It is time for the Labour Party to move on. Its history on capital spend projects is not very good. The trams, which just started operating, were one of its babies—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

George Adam: Did the Labour Party want GARL to get to the same stage as the trams? Even this building went massively over budget under Labour, so I will not get told about capital spend by anybody from the Labour Party.

Iain Gray: Will the member give way?

George Adam: Not at the moment, thank you.

Look at some of the companies that are involved in Scotland and are backing this. Some of my colleagues mentioned Edinburgh airport, the chief executive of which, Gordon Dewar, said:

"This tax has now hit its tipping point where the damage that it is doing to Scotland far outweighs the benefits."

Amanda McMillan, managing director of Glasgow airport, said:

"On the question of devolution of APD, Glasgow Airport has always been supportive of this proposal given the Scottish government's more progressive approach to aviation and its greater appreciation of the role the industry plays".

Even Liz Cameron of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said:

"Current rates of APD seem more suited to controlling capacity constraints at Heathrow than they do with the needs of regional airports, and devolution of this tax would afford the Scottish Government the opportunity to create an air transport package for Scotland designed to improve our direct international connectivity."

One of my colleagues mentioned Flybe, which is a regional airline that has a unique aviation model and covers all our regions and areas. Its chief executive officer said:

"We welcome today's debate as an important step towards rectifying this taxation which places us, as a UK

regional airline, at a competitive disadvantage and continues to damage Scotland's aspirations for economic growth ... New destinations going hand-in-hand with considerably more passengers can only mean one thing—growth".

Is that not the most important thing: growth and investment in our economy? A lot of members do not seem to understand that.

Alex Johnstone: How would the devolution of this tax help passengers from Scotland arriving at London to connect with other flights? Surely George Adam understands that the abolition of this tax on a UK basis would be far more beneficial to Scottish passengers than simply devolving it and abolishing it here.

George Adam: Mr Johnstone misunderstands my arguments about connectivity and direct flights, which actually make Scotland part of the world.

Alex Johnstone made a road to Damascus speech on APD. The Calman commission said that APD should be devolved. Lord Strathclyde's commission said that APD should be devolved. Here we go: promises, promises from the Tories. Why do they not just stick it in the Queen's speech? In fact, why does Alex Johnstone not take a flight down, pay the APD, and ask one of his colleagues to stick it in the Queen's speech?

I ask Mr Johnstone to put his money where his mouth is so that we can have the argument and the Conservatives could do something apart from pandering and trying to be relevant in the independence debate. Along with the many other things that the Scottish Government has promoted, APD is another reason why we need independence, and I believe that if we get that opportunity, we can connect Scotland to the rest of the world and change the lives of people in Scotland.

16:30

Patrick Harvie: Most of the arguments that we have heard about the tax side of the debate, just as with the Scottish Government's approach to corporation tax, seem to boil down to little more than Laffer curve mythology—the notion of taking a theoretical graph and extrapolating from it an argument that cutting pretty much any tax is justified in any circumstances. It is cover for an ideological position that I reject.

I do not think that that notion is true but, even if it was, the argument that Elaine Murray made at one point in her speech is very clear. Even if cutting taxes increased revenue, there would be a delay effect and the Scottish Government's budget would take a hit in the short term. There are those who might want to extend that argument and abolish a whole host of other taxes, no doubt to Mr Johnstone's joy. However, I hope that we can

challenge the notion that doing so would increase tax revenues.

We have heard several arguments about the notion of incentivising long-haul connections to replace short-haul connections and about how that would have some benefit. We heard that from Mr Adam, who seems to be the latest in a list of members who have not noticed that we can actually get to London by train. The same notion was also used by the Labour-Lib Dem coalition to justify the air route development fund and it simply does not stand up to scrutiny. Even if additional long-haul flights are put in place, it simply frees up slots at airports where the connections would have happened, those slots are quickly filled up by other long-haul flights, and the increase in emissions continues. That is what happened under the air route development fund—there were continual increases in emissions—and it would happen under the proposed scenario.

Some members have talked about fuel efficiency in aviation as something that can reduce the emissions from the industry. It is true that only fuel efficiency can hold back the increase in emissions that comes from increased aviation, but it cannot stop it altogether.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: No, thank you.

We saw what happened with the fuel efficiency of cars, which increased dramatically during the 20th century: the increase in use of those cars meant that overall fuel consumption and therefore overall pollution went up as well. That is what is happening with aviation—and I quote the International Air Transport Association, which says:

“fuel efficiency gains have partially decoupled CO₂ emissions from expanding air transport services”.

It talks about a 1.9 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency and projects a further 1.7 per cent increase in fuel efficiency in 2014. That is set against a 5.2 per cent increase in air transport itself, so there is still an increase in emissions of 722 million tonnes of greenhouse gases before factoring in the radiative forcing effect.

Mike MacKenzie: Is the member aware that the solar-powered aircraft Solar Impulse 2 had its maiden flight yesterday? Along with electric cars, those technologies will ultimately solve—

Patrick Harvie: I like the drawing board as well, and I will be interested to see when that aircraft or any other zero-carbon aviation mode of transport comes into commercial operation. However, we are limited by what is available at the moment and what the industry is doing today around the world.

Those increases in fuel efficiency will be limited by two things: what is practically achievable; and what is profitable for the industry. No public policy can change the former, and the lack of fuel duty reduces the incentive for the industry to invest in more efficient practices and reduce emissions that way.

Claudia Beamish was one of many members who talked about the CO₂ impact. I started asking the Scottish Government questions about the CO₂ impact of its policy as soon as the policy was announced, which must be more than two years ago. After the First Minister gave a commitment that the policy's impact on carbon emissions would be assessed, there was a delay of 18 months before we got any kind of answer to my continual questions, while the climate change and transport ministers vacillated about who would answer the question.

Two months ago—at last—Paul Wheelhouse confirmed that the SNP's air passenger duty policy would increase emissions. I thought that that was the final word, but today it seems that the transport minister is rowing back from that position. That is simply not credible. It begins to sound as though the SNP is just making it up as it goes along. If we are to take the policy or any replacement for air passenger duty seriously, we need to assess the impact before the Scottish Government makes its decision.

We heard from members that the policy is supported by the aviation industry. My jaw was on the floor at that point—it really was. A profit-driven private sector business does not want to pay tax—wow!

Mr Adam advanced the argument that the damage that is done by air passenger duty outweighs its benefits. No. If we continue to allow the industry to expand and not pay its environmental costs, it is the industry that will cause damage that is greater than the benefits that it brings.

Believe it or not, Presiding Officer, I am not arguing that we should dig up the runways to plant cabbages—I am really not. What I am saying is that the industry should pay its share and is not currently doing so. I am saying that if we are serious about climate change we cannot allow the industry to grow for ever, and that our real priority should be good-quality, reliable, affordable alternatives.

16:36

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): This has been an interesting debate, in which we have heard a range of views, from Alex Johnstone's description of tax as a necessary evil, to Labour's argument that the economic benefit must be balanced

against the impact on the public finances, the Greens' opposition to any reduction in APD on a point of principle—primarily an environmental principle—and the arguments from SNP members, who are so enthusiastic about abolishing APD that they say that it must be gone by some unspecified point after 2020. Abolition is such a no-brainer and we will get so much more in taxation afterwards that APD must be gone by then, say SNP members.

That was classic SNP hyperbole. It was a classic attempt to turn the debate into yet another debate about the referendum. Once again, the Scottish Government has complained loudly and bitterly about the powers that it does not have, as it does day in, day out, and week in, week out, while refusing to do anything with the powers that it has.

Let us consider the taxation powers that the Scottish Government has, such as powers over land and buildings transaction tax, which is coming into force, or, more broadly, business rates for the tourism industry. The Government has done nothing with business rates for the tourism industry and is refusing point blank to say what it will do with LBTT. If it wanted to be credible on the matter, it would demonstrate its credibility by using the powers that it has to take action.

Mike MacKenzie: Does Mr Brown agree that what he said perfectly illustrates the inadequacy of partial devolution? The art of taxation is to achieve good public outcomes by giving away with one hand and recouping with the other. That is the whole point, and that is what limited devolution's offering of a wee bit more tax powers here and there does not allow us to do.

Gavin Brown: What I said demonstrates the inadequacy of the current Scottish Government's approach. I will come back to the point about recouping tax with the other hand, because a classic example of SNP spin in that regard was handed to me just a couple of minutes ago.

First, on airlines, the Scottish Government has the power to introduce an air route development fund. Such a policy was introduced by the previous Executive in 2002 and was successful. Patrick Harvie mentioned the policy: he did not like it but he said clearly that it was successful in the context of short-haul and long-haul flights for Scotland.

It was fair enough to scrap the policy, at least temporarily, in 2007. The result of the EU ruling made it difficult for it to continue in its existing form. However, seven years later, had the Scottish Government had the political will, it could have found an EU-compliant successor to the air route development fund.

What work has been done on it by the Scottish Government? Perhaps the transport minister will tell us. What papers has the Government published about the investigation into how it might be done? Let us hear from the Government later on that point and let us see what work is currently being done in relation to what the Government could do with an air route development fund, because there is definitely scope to do something.

I now come to the point that I want to make in response to Mr MacKenzie. Every SNP member today, including the minister, said that abolition is a no-brainer because we would recoup far more VAT than the money that we get from APD. They say that they are not making it up: they have reports from PWC and from York Aviation—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Gavin Brown: All the reports said that we would recoup more money from VAT. Mr Stevenson—admittedly saying that it was a back of an envelope calculation—pointed out that we would get more money from hotels and restaurants through VAT. That is very interesting, because I have in my hand an article from *Travel GBI*, the number 1 magazine for domestic travel tourism and business use across the UK. Are we going to collect more VAT? No, because the tourism minister is promising a tax cut on VAT for all of the tourism and hospitality industry. The magazine article states:

"Scotland tourism minister Fergus Ewing has confirmed that an independent Scotland could reduce VAT on tourism".

He has suggested that we should cut VAT on the hospitality industry from 20 to 5 per cent. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Gavin Brown: MSP Graeme Dey—no wonder he is sitting at the back of the chamber today—is quoted in the article as saying:

"the VAT rate on tourism in Scotland and the refusal of the UK Government to cut it is just one of many examples of why Scotland's interests would be best served by being an independent country."

Let me just ask this question—

Chic Brodie rose—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is just finishing.

Gavin Brown: By how much would tourism need to increase in order to recoup all the VAT and all the money from APD that the SNP says that it is going to cut within the first few years of independence? Iain Gray said that this was a proxy for the independence debate; it has been exactly that and the SNP has been found out—it is

making promises that do not stack up at all. It is about time the Scottish people saw the SNP in its true light.

16:43

James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): It has been a very interesting afternoon. It started off with Mr Johnstone spelling out the evils of taxation. I did not realise that Mr Johnstone was so influential—we then had many Reaganite speeches against taxation from the SNP back benchers. It is quite clear that this is the afternoon for the right wingers on the SNP benches. *[Interruption.]* No wonder Christina McKelvie looks embarrassed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

James Kelly: Three central themes have come out of the debate: the impact on the Scottish budget; the attitude of the Government to climate change; and its central view on transport policy.

On the Scottish budget, Iain Gray and Patrick Harvie are absolutely correct: if the Government is going to propose a 50 per cent cut in APD, which will take £135 million out of the Scottish budget, it needs to explain to people where it will make cuts. Does it mean that we will have fewer classroom assistants? Does it mean that we will have fewer nurses? The Government needs to be up front and honest with people about these things.

Chic Brodie *rose—*

James Kelly: Let me develop this point. If Alex Neil says at the weekend that he wants to get rid of 15-minute care visits, how can that be done if one of the first acts of an SNP Government in an independent Scotland is to cut corporation tax and APD by 50 per cent, taking £500 million out of the budget? It is time that we had some honesty.

The whole issue of climate change has been a very interesting aspect of the debate. Claudia Beamish made a substantive contribution regarding the action needed to tackle greenhouse gas emissions. It is interesting that, with the exception of a brief interlude from Stewart Stevenson, the SNP back benchers have completely ignored the climate change issue in the debate. It was almost a case of “Shut your eyes and it will go away; we don’t need to talk about that.”

Patrick Harvie: I wonder whether Mr Kelly is being unfair: we heard from Mike MacKenzie that there is a one-seater solar plane that is going to solve the problem. *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

James Kelly: Yes. To be fair to Mr MacKenzie, I think he said that it was still at the drawing board. Mr Harvie should not misrepresent his position. It has not quite taken off yet.

Mike MacKenzie *rose—*

Members: Oh!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

James Kelly: As regards the attitude to climate change, I was in the chamber when the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill was passed. Everybody in the Parliament agreed to it, and we all sat and clapped away. There were a lot of happy clappers on the SNP benches, but they cannot clap away like that and say that they want a 46 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2020—

Stewart Stevenson: It was 42 per cent.

James Kelly: —if they also want a 50 per cent reduction in APD. Those two policy objectives do not sit together. What should really have happened in the debate was for the SNP Government to bring in Paul Wheelhouse, who should have wound up the debate and answered how the policy of a 50 per cent reduction in APD squares with trying to reduce carbon emissions. It is sheer hypocrisy.

My third theme concerns the wider issues around transport policy and how it affects airports. A number of members have spoken about the importance of connectivity, which the Government should perhaps have been concentrating on this afternoon. The Commonwealth games are coming up shortly, and people will be arriving at Glasgow airport, where there is no rail link to take them to the Commonwealth games venues.

It is interesting to consider the growth in the number of car parks around Glasgow airport. People are driving in their cars to the airport and are therefore increasing carbon emissions. If there were proper connectivity and better public transport links in place, people would not need to go to the airport car parks, and that would reduce emissions.

Stewart Stevenson: I wonder whether the member recalls that the study into GARL showed that it would take 15 cars off the M8 in the peak travel hour. The money should be invested in ways that are actually effective in getting cars off the road, perhaps even improving the bus services until other options can be made available.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kelly, you have one minute left.

James Kelly: It is a pity that the SNP Government chose to pour £30 million of public money from GARL down the drain, instead of investing in a link that could have had a real benefit to Glasgow.

To progress the debate, we need proper evidence on the environmental and economic impacts, which would allow us to take an informed

position not only on whether APD is correct but also on the level of APD.

As many members have said, the debate that we are having on APD is a proxy for the independence debate. The SNP starts off with uncoded promises—which, in this case, take the form of cuts to APD that it cannot square with the reductions in carbon emissions that it hopes to achieve—and ends up with an all-things-to-all-men policy that completely lacks coherence. We need a proper, grown-up discussion about transport policy and APD. SNP members need to stop kidding themselves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close.

James Kelly: I hope that, post-September 18—whatever the result of the referendum—we can discuss the issues properly so that we can support transport policy and Scotland's airports properly.

16:50

Keith Brown: As James Kelly said, this has been a relatively interesting debate in which some good speeches have been made. Those by Mike MacKenzie and Graeme Dey, in particular, were very effective.

Claudia Beamish concentrated on environmental benefits and expressed a desire to improve the prospects of rail travel vis-à-vis air travel. I agree with her on that. The question that we must ask is why the Labour Party has still not committed to bringing high-speed rail to Scotland. That is the biggest single development that would result in modal shift from air to rail, and the Labour Party still does not support it. To be fair, I say that neither do the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats support it, despite their manifesto commitments to bringing high-speed rail to Scotland.

I agree with many of the points that Claudia Beamish and Elaine Murray made. Elaine Murray suggested that we could incentivise use of better fuels or penalise use of more damaging fuels but, as I think she said, such issues must be dealt with at international level, which is how they are dealt with at the moment. That was a perfectly reasonable point to make.

I do not agree with the sneering approach that some members took to the new technology in the solar aeroplane that Mike MacKenzie mentioned. Such developments take time: I certainly hope that that one succeeds.

There has been a remarkable degree of displacement activity on the part of the unionist parties—they have done anything but give straight answers on the positions that they now hold. Even after listening to what Alex Johnstone said, I still

do not understand whether the Tories support devolution of APD. He started off by saying that the tax is “evil” but went on to say that perhaps it is “a necessary evil”. He failed to say whether he supports its devolution. What was really interesting was the attack that he made on the aviation industry—not least when he laughed along with Patrick Harvie while he made his attack—and the York Aviation report. Essentially, his point was that, given the growth in use of airports, the industry is doing all right anyway, so it can live with the tax. That undermines what Ruth Davidson said yesterday, when she talked about devolving APD. The Tories are all over the place on the issue.

Gavin Brown's speech was even more interesting. At one point—in an intervention on a back bencher—he seemed to be arguing for immediate abolition of APD. Incredibly, he asked what the benefit would be of reducing APD for Scottish holidaymakers who want to go to Florida. We are talking about the party that supports Hayek, Friedman and Keith Joseph, yet Gavin Brown is arguing that the most punitive tax in the world be imposed on Scottish taxpayers. How does he square that with advocating a low-tax economy?

Gavin Brown said that reducing APD would have no benefit for the Scottish economy or the people of Scotland. He might want to think about that for a bit longer, because it would have obvious benefits. It would benefit the airports, which would increase their business through increased custom. Airlines and individuals would benefit, too. It is a relatively basic part of tax theory that it is possible to increase economic activity by reducing taxes. Mr Brown argues that people who want to go to Florida should face the heaviest possible tax. I remind Parliament that, prior to 2007, a family would have paid £80 in APD to go on holiday to Florida, whereas in the summer of 2014, they will have to pay £276 for the same trip. The people of Scotland will be interested to know that Gavin Brown supports that wholeheartedly.

I turn to some points that Patrick Harvie made. He mentioned that the proposed reduction of APD would be of great benefit to the airline industry. We cannot deny that the airline industry would benefit, but he has never acknowledged that APD is paid by passengers. I have not had his experience of globetrotting on long-haul flights, to which he has confessed previously. *[Interruption.]* He did that in the most recent debate. I am sure that he must realise that it is individuals who pay APD and not the airline industry.

Patrick Harvie: One of the questions that I put earlier was about whether the Government is consistent in its assessment of the carbon impact

of its policy. Just two months ago we finally got confirmation from Paul Wheelhouse, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, that the Government's policy will increase emissions, but the transport minister seemed to imply today the precise opposite. Which minister should I believe?

Keith Brown: I answered the question earlier. Patrick Harvie might not have been listening, at that point. I mentioned that we would have £1.3 billion to support delivery of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that we have reduced transport emissions in Scotland since 2007 by 1.7 million tonnes, which is about 12 per cent. I have also said, as has Paul Wheelhouse, that we will conduct a study of our policy once we have introduced the 50 per cent cut in APD. If we get the opportunity to reduce APD, then of course we will have to study the effects of that. That is a responsible position.

I really struggle to work out what the Labour Party's position is on APD. We had an idea of it from Iain Gray, who described APD at some length as a bad tax that is riddled with inconsistencies and anomalies and is no longer an environmental tax. However, his solution is to leave it to the people who invented the tax to deal with it. I think that we can make a better job of dealing with it in Scotland.

We have had the same inconsistency from the Conservatives, who said yes to the Calman proposal on APD, but then nothing happened for five years. Ruth Davidson has apparently said yes to devolving APD, but has no intention of doing anything about it very quickly. As George Adam rightly said, there is no reason why a proposal to devolve APD cannot be contained in the Queen's speech tomorrow. If the Conservatives really believe—I am sceptical about this—that APD should be devolved, it can be announced tomorrow. Whether by train or by plane, the Conservatives here can get on to their people in Westminster to ensure that that happens.

The simple fact is that the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party agreed with the Calman proposal to devolve APD. What has changed since then? What has made the big difference? Why has it not happened? Why the inertia on the part of the unionist parties? I admit that different people were involved at the time of Calman: Wendy Alexander, Annabel Goldie and either Tavish Scott or Nicol Stephen. However, why has nothing happened in relation to devolution of APD? The demand out there for it has been ignored.

Gavin Brown: Will the minister give way?

Keith Brown: I will just finish this point.

The airline industry is demanding the abolition of APD, but there is also a real concern about APD

among people who have seen the cost of their air travel go through the roof because of a tax that everyone acknowledges has nothing to do with the environment and is all about revenue raising.

Gavin Brown: What work has the transport minister personally done in the past couple of years on the air route development fund, which is a power that he currently has?

Keith Brown: I could go through the meetings that we have had with airports and airlines, and the documents that we have produced in trying to speak to people about that. However, to try to wish away the fact that the air route development fund was abolished—

Gavin Brown: You have done nothing.

Keith Brown: Does Gavin Brown not believe that we have had those meetings? Is that his point? The simple fact is that he knows that Europe said that it was no longer possible to use the air route development fund. Trying to ignore that just leaves him without any credibility on the points that he is trying to put forward.

The Liberal Democrats are so weak in their position on APD that they tried to turn the debate into one about childcare benefit, which was unbelievable. They then disappeared for the entire debate—there were no Liberal Democrats here. That shows the weakness of the unionist parties on the issue.

Kevin Stewart: Hear, hear.

Keith Brown: The idea that criticism of APD comes from just the airline industry and not from individuals is completely wrongheaded. We know from talking to people that they know that they are paying extra because of APD, and that it is the highest tax of its kind in the world.

It is a fairly straightforward issue to resolve. If the other parties believe that APD should be devolved—that has been their position at various points, although it has changed—they can very quickly resolve that by just getting on to their colleagues down in Westminster. Michael Moore has been quoted as supporting devolution of APD, people in the Labour Party have been quoted as supporting it and so have people in the Conservatives. They should just get on to their colleagues in Westminster, because they can sort the problem tomorrow. That would be a real example of how the union can work—as they believe—for the people of Scotland, so they should get on the phone and get it sorted out today.

Despite all that the other parties have said on APD, they have done nothing, and people do not believe them. In the same way, they invented figures that they announced last week in order to try to impress on people that the start-up costs of

an independent Scotland would be £2.7 billion. It was then found out that they had magnified the actual figures by 12 times, and were totally discredited by the words of Professor Dunleavy. They are also failing to serve the people of Scotland.

This is a fairly straightforward issue, because the other parties said that they supported the abolition of APD. It should be abolished, and that is perfectly deliverable: get on the phone and get it changed.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on air passenger duty. Before we move on to decision time, I remind members that, in relation to the debate, if the amendment in the name of Mark Griffin is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alex Johnstone will fall. [*Interruption.*]

I ask whoever has the mobile phone on to switch it off, please. We can tell who it is because they have gone red in the face.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-10185.2, in the name of Mark Griffin, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10185, in the name of Keith Brown, on air passenger duty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 63, Abstentions 13.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-10185.1, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10185, in the name of Keith Brown, on air passenger duty, 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)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (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)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 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)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 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 17, Against 88, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-10185.3, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10185, in the name of Keith Brown, on air passenger duty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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, Aileen (Clydesdale) (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)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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 4, Against 101, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-10185, in the name of Keith Brown, on air passenger duty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 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

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (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)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 44, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes with concern the continuing prevarication of the UK Government in devolving control of air passenger duty (APD) despite the clear recommendation of the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution in 2009, evidence of the damaging impact of the significant increases in APD since 2007 and the growing campaign for control for it to be devolved; further notes the APD changes that were announced in the 2014 UK Budget, which, from April 2015, will amend the existing four-band system and, as a consequence, reduce duty paid on journeys of more than 4,000 miles; further notes that, based on the international destinations currently served from Scotland's airports, this will be of minimal immediate value to Scotland; believes that improving Scotland's international air connectivity and the ability of its aviation sector to properly compete with global competitors is a matter that needs to be urgently addressed; considers that this would be assisted by control of APD being devolved, and believes that, in the event of a Yes vote in the independence referendum, the UK Government should devolve this as a matter of priority in order to enable the Scottish Government to progress the proposals contained in *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland* to reduce APD by 50% in the first term of an independent Scottish Parliament and to seek to abolish it when public finances allow.

Point of Order

17:05

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise for not giving notice of my point of order, which arises from the air passenger duty debate.

I am very aware that matters of veracity are not for the chair, so I will not ask you, Presiding Officer, to judge the accuracy of a statement. However, we heard from the Minister for Transport and Veterans that the climate change impact of the air passenger duty policy has not yet been assessed. In topical questions on 1 April, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change gave a figure for the climate change impact of the air passenger duty policy and clearly indicated that such an assessment had been made. Given that we have heard two contradictory statements from ministers, what is the best approach, under our standing orders, for me to discover the accuracy of those statements—I will not ask you to judge that, Presiding Officer—and to find out which is true?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Patrick Harvie is right that issues of veracity are not for me, as the Presiding Officer. He has been a member for a long time, so he knows what mechanisms are open to him. He can lodge a written question, ask an oral question or send a letter to the ministers.

One Parent Families Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-10053, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on One Parent Families Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the work that One Parent Family Scotland (OPFS) does with communities to empower Scottish families to overcome the barriers that they encounter; acknowledges the support that it provides for parents to help them give their children the best possible chances in life, with improved health and a stable home environment; understands that, in 2012-13, OPFS directly supported over 2,000 children and over 1,000 adults through group and individual support sessions; notes in particular its Transforming Lives project, which was recently celebrated in Hamilton and involves groups of single mums, most in their late teens or early twenties, who have not had the greatest environment to bring their child up in; considers that, through Transforming Lives, they have discovered what they are capable of and are evidently determined to achieve; commends Margaret McTaggart, who leads the programme, for, it considers, tirelessly helping the young women to get to grips with the practicalities of motherhood; recommends the OPFS's recent annual report, *Better lives, Built together*, which it considers is packed full of case studies describing how the organisation's intervention helped change lives positively; wishes OPFS the best of luck in the future, and welcomes its positive contribution to communities across Scotland.

17:07

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank all colleagues across the chamber who have signed the motion and supported the great work of One Parent Families Scotland, which has allowed us to have the debate. I welcome to the public gallery people who are involved in One Parent Families Scotland who have come through from the west to spend the afternoon with us and to listen to the debate. We need to get this right for those people, so no pressure.

When someone happens to get pregnant at 15, her mother is not too enamoured, the boyfriend has legged it and her big sister thinks that she is mad even to consider having a baby, she feels very alone. I was enormously impressed when, in my constituency, I heard the stories of young single mums who had been benefiting from the mentoring of folk from One Parent Families Scotland on its transforming lives programme.

That programme really transforms lives. The young mums go from the start of the process to the awards ceremony. They make progress, they have aspirations, they set goals and they form strong bonds with the women they meet on that journey.

The young mothers I met at Whitehill neighbourhood centre in Hamilton were a testament to the difference that it makes when people have strong local support in their lives. They talked about the lifelong friendships that they had formed during the programme and about how they now saw opportunities that had never crossed their minds before. They were indeed transformed.

Those young mothers wanted to get out there and grab every chance that they could for themselves and their children. They had learned a lot about what they could do and how they could do it and a lot about what their talents and skills were and how to apply them positively.

Contrary to Johann Lamont's something-for-nothing culture, those young women refuse to be caught in the benefits trap. They want something better than that for themselves and their children, and they absolutely merit access to the agencies that can help them to move forward. Their children deserve that, too. Motherhood and fatherhood are hard work—ask any of us who have been there. People accumulate a lot of skills, a lot of resilience and a lot of problem-solving abilities along the way.

One Parent Families Scotland offers a range of advice, from courses to a helpline to downloadable information packs that cover everything from separation and divorce to fuel and energy advice, work, employability, education and even web safety. Its services include childcare, employability and family support services and an information and advice service that can be contacted via 0800 801 0323, which is a freephone number.

The Scottish Government wants every child to have the best possible start in life, and an element of that is ensuring that no mum or dad is denied access to the services and support that can help them with their child to fulfil their potential. The mentoring of Margaret McTaggart, who is in the public gallery—she will have a red face, and I will get a row for that—and her team at One Parent Families Scotland is crucial for confidence as well as achievement. One of the main things that I have seen at awards ceremonies is the confidence and trust that young mums have developed in Margaret and her team. They trust them implicitly, take advice, guidance and support and make lifelong friendships. As Margaret has said:

"It's not about being smart or academic, it's about real life; about having the opportunities that will allow you to make a real contribution for yourself, for your child and for the wider community too."

Benefits in the United Kingdom are tightening all the time and young mothers are an easy target for Westminster's austerity regime. The Scottish Government believes that this country's children are our future, and we are proving that with our

commitment to transformational childcare. That was the word “transformational” again. The word “transformation” is a very important word in the debate.

Today's *Daily Record* reveals that, after asking for the Scottish Government's input to a report on implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Westminster Government withheld the Scottish Government's position from the final report. In that final report, the Westminster Government claimed that welfare changes will help to reduce child poverty. It completely failed to include any reference to the Scottish Government's position that Westminster's welfare cuts will only make child poverty worse.

Last week, Save the Children warned that the number of children who live in poverty in the UK is set to rise by 41 per cent, from 3.5 million to 5 million, by 2020 as a result of flat wages, cuts to benefits and the rising cost of living. That is an amazing and unbelievable figure. Every single one of those 5 million is a small child.

Poverty is a man-made problem, but it can be unmade, too. However, the Westminster Government seems hell-bent on continuing its destructive policies, and the children here are the biggest losers.

We should contrast that with the Scottish Government's approach. Through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, we are already increasing the available free hours to 600 a year. Come independence, the Scottish Government will go much further: if we are re-elected, we will introduce 1,140 hours of free childcare for pre-school children. That is the equivalent of a full school week, and that will help not only to close the attainment gap; it will help mothers and fathers to fulfil their own ambitions with the support of our society behind them.

The amazing women I met in Hamilton are excited by that prospect. They see how it can open opportunities for both them and their children. They were amazed when I told them that, in Norway, the economic impact of women in the workforce is equivalent to that of the country's oil income.

Scotland cares about its future generations and we want to see every child, as well as every parent, fulfilling his or her hopes and ambitions. I have no doubt that many of my colleagues across the chamber feel the same, although perhaps we disagree on the method of achieving that aspiration and transformation for our children.

With a yes vote in September, we can look forward to building on the fantastic support services that One Parent Families Scotland already has in place and to truly transforming the

lives of mums and dads, and more important, the lives of our children.

17:13

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on lodging the motion and pay tribute to the work of One Parent Families Scotland. I believe that it was founded in 1944. From my own experience, I certainly know that it has done a wide range of very important work for decades.

Christina McKelvie described the work in her constituency. I pay tribute to the project that she described, which is one example of many throughout Scotland that we can cite. There are certainly many projects in Edinburgh. In fact, the headquarters of One Parent Families Scotland was in my constituency for a long time. Unfortunately, the boundary slipped slightly, so it is now in Marco Biagi's constituency. Nevertheless, over many years, I have had a close relationship with One Parent Families Scotland, particularly when Sue Robertson was the director. It has certainly had a big influence on me and on my thinking on the matters that it deals with.

Near the beginning, the motion describes One Parent Families Scotland's work pretty succinctly when it says that it works to

“empower Scottish families to overcome the barriers that they encounter”.

If any phrase can encapsulate its work, that does. Christina McKelvie described the wide range of work that the charity does, which includes the family support project in her constituency. There are many projects throughout Scotland that support women but, in Edinburgh, there is a dads club. One Parent Families Scotland has been involved in that area of work for some time. I pay tribute to Ian Maxwell from the central organisation, who developed much of that work before he moved on to another post.

Christina McKelvie also mentioned employability support. Most lone parents want to have the opportunity to move into work at a time that is appropriate for them, but sometimes the route to employment can be complex and might involve things such as personal development training. Much of One Parent Families Scotland's work is focused on that. It also provides flexible and affordable childcare services, including childcare at home and mobile crèches, and, crucially, it provides information and advice, including through its lone parent helpline. I can claim a slight connection with that because, believe it or not, I was supposed to launch it in Scotland in March 2002 with J K Rowling—although I suppose that J K Rowling was supposed to launch it with me. However, she did not turn up—I was told that she

was ill—so I ended up having to launch it myself. I am certainly pleased that the helpline continues to do its excellent work.

The information and advice aspect has led One Parent Families Scotland to get involved in campaigning. It knows better than anyone the problems that lone parents face. Christina McKelvie highlighted the welfare changes and child poverty, which are such an unfortunate feature of One Parent Families Scotland's present case load. Many issues have arisen because of the recent change under which lone parents have to find work when their children are five. Some parents will want to find work before that, if that is appropriate for them, which is fine, but the measure has caused difficulties and pressures for some parents, and it has perhaps been implemented differentially. There is also the issue of sanctions—in my constituency, I have come across quite appalling circumstances in which a lone parent has been sanctioned for no good reason at all.

There are lots of particular issues, most of which are the responsibility of the Westminster Government, as Christina McKelvie pointed out. However, to repeat a point that I made in the childcare debate last week, because lone parents have to look for work when their child is five, many lone parents, who might be 25, 30 or even older, need support. The childcare academy in my constituency has drawn attention to the fact that Skills Development Scotland primarily provides places in the academy for parents who are under 25. There is an issue there for Skills Development Scotland.

My final point, which also comes from the childcare academy, takes us back to Jobcentre Plus. When parents are in training, Jobcentre Plus provides childcare support of £35 a day, which is absolutely standard, but in Edinburgh it is sometimes difficult to find childcare, which is a problem for some of the lone parents who attend the academy and, no doubt, those who are in other training places throughout Scotland.

So there are a range of issues, but I am happy to endorse the motion and to once again pay tribute to One Parent Families Scotland.

17:18

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate my colleague Christina McKelvie on securing this members' business debate. I apologise in advance, as I might have to leave the chamber early—I have a previous commitment this evening, so I might not hear the closing speech.

We all know that families come in all shapes and sizes and that their make-up is affected by a

myriad of circumstances, including bereavement. However, we know that, without fear or favour, they all have a home at One Parent Families Scotland.

I am particularly glad to speak about the organisation, because of the work that it does across my region of Central Scotland. Ms McKelvie has already highlighted its work in South Lanarkshire, particularly with young mothers in the Whitehill neighbourhood centre, but I will highlight a project in North Lanarkshire—the us together project, which is aimed at single fathers. The project organises free activities and outings for single fathers and their children, including for men who have only a part-time role in caring and who maybe see their children for only part of the time.

I have been very moved by other debates in the chamber. My colleague Christian Allard is speaking in the debate. He has highlighted some of the challenges that he has experienced as a single father and, I am sure, would be interested in the project. It takes families off to soft play centres, swimming centres and play parks. Fathers get a chance to meet, bond with and share their experiences with other men who are bringing up children on their own.

One of the key strengths of One Parent Families Scotland is that it not only nurtures the family and its emotional needs but helps on a range of issues that affect single parents, including housing, parenting benefits, education, training and accessing other support for the family. I point out that the support is available to fathers of all ages because, as I said, families come in all shapes and sizes.

I was particularly pleased that Ms McKelvie mentioned the One Parent Families Scotland helpline, which is 0808 801 0323—I mention it again because it is important—because it also gives legal advice to unmarried fathers about welfare and child support issues. That is an extremely important part of what the organisation does.

I also highlight a project in the north of my Central Scotland constituency: the Braes family support centre in Falkirk. Support workers are there to offer one-to-one and group support for single parents. They consider issues such as setting boundaries in families, parenting skills, debt, benefits advice and supporting the mental health of the families who are involved in the centre.

Those are two extremely important projects in which One Parent Families Scotland is involved in my area. I also highlight the support that it gives on employability because it recognises that, when young people find themselves caring for their children in circumstances that were perhaps

unplanned and unexpected, it can close an awful lot of doors in their lives. One Parent Families Scotland supports people in employability, working closely with partner agencies, to get an integrated package of support for families in their local communities, thereby giving them an opportunity to make realistic work and life choices that benefit their families in the long run.

One Parent Families Scotland also campaigns on behalf of its members and the people it supports. That includes campaigning work on childcare, which is pertinent to the debate about Scotland's future. The organisation recognises that accessible, affordable and flexible childcare is at the heart of supporting families in the areas that I mentioned.

17:23

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Christina McKelvie for lodging this important motion. The work that One Parent Families Scotland has done in its long history is commendable. It is good that people from the charity are in the public gallery this evening.

As Christina McKelvie rightly said, being a single parent inevitably comes with a host of challenges. That parent may be young and still trying to find his or her way in the world. He or she may lack confidence about the best way to bring up his or her child. They may struggle to balance work commitments with childcare. They may face stigmatising attitudes towards them in society, most especially if they face poverty issues related to abuse. Of course, if the parent or his or her child also suffers from health problems, that makes it doubly difficult.

Over the years, OPFS has brought to our attention the great number of one-parent families in Scotland. It is now estimated that there are somewhere in the region of 165,500 one-parent families in Scotland. That involves 281,000 children. In both cases, that is a significant rise on the statistics that there might have been 20 or 30 years ago. As Malcolm Chisholm rightly said in his speech, the range of support that OPFS provides is, therefore, even more important; so, too, is the concern that we have for those who provide the front-line services, often in difficult circumstances.

As we all know from several recent debates in the Parliament, one of the biggest challenges that single parents face at the moment is finding affordable and reliable childcare. That is made doubly difficult for single parents who operate on low incomes, as they know that it can often be an additional barrier to finding employment and being able to support themselves and their children. I thought that Malcolm Chisholm raised some

important points about some of the work that is being done in his constituency on that.

The OPFS has a childcare at home service, which is registered with the Care Inspectorate. It provides quality childcare in the family home, which can provide great security for the families that we are talking about and is provided seven days a week. The OPFS has a mobile crèche as well. It is an excellent service, and it is obviously very much appreciated by everyone involved.

As parliamentarians, we constantly receive strong messages about policy measures that we could adopt to support lone parents with their childcare, especially regarding the facility to book childcare assistance by the hour rather than by the block, thus minimising unnecessary expenditure, and the need to work with employers to help them to be as accommodating as they can be when it comes to supporting parents' childcare needs. There is a need to encourage flexible working times to allow parents to take their children home at the right time. That is particularly relevant for lone parents who do not have any support from other family members.

That flexibility would help to break down some of the barriers that prevent many lone parents from entering the workplace. The 2011 census was a stark reminder of the work that we have to do to ensure that those single parents can be helped.

As has been noted in the motion, Margaret McTaggart is a shining example with regard to the help that she has provided in the important area of employability—I know that she will be embarrassed by those words, but she deserves great credit. Her wise counsel about awareness and support is crucial with regard to the positive influence that can be provided. She should not be embarrassed in any way. We owe her a great debt in that regard.

Once again, I thank Christina McKelvie for bringing this matter to the Parliament, and I thank OPFS for the work that it does.

17:27

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Like the members before me, I congratulate Christina McKelvie on securing this debate on an important motion that recognises the work that One Parent Families Scotland has done in Scotland for the past 65 years with regard to advocacy and service delivery expertise. It has more than 200 staff and a turnover of more than £2 million.

I particularly enjoyed Christina McKelvie's opening speech, which made a good point about mothers and fathers. Malcolm Chisholm talked

about the great services for fathers that we now have in Edinburgh. He also talked about opportunities for single parents, which is something that I recognise very much. I know that J K Rowling is a great example for single mothers, but we need to have that kind of example for single fathers as well. It is important to have such a role model that can enable people to understand what opportunities there are for single parents both during the time when they are raising their children and after their children have grown up.

As Clare Adamson pointed out, for more than 10 years I was a single father. That is part of myself and is one of the reasons why I am in Parliament today. The struggle of being a single parent can make people realise the challenges that are involved for single mothers and single fathers, and for the children.

I recognise the fantastic work that One Parent Families Scotland does. I know how much it encourages lone parents in the North East Scotland to believe in themselves, discover new talents, take up new interests and enter education, training or work. In Dundee, it runs a community family support project. It also runs a group called us together—supporting Scotland's children and their fathers. I note in OPFS's annual report that contributors such as Scottish Television have made great contributions to enable the organisation to develop innovative services such as those at the new Families House in Dundee, which I would love to go and visit.

Dundee also has flexible childcare facilities. Those same services are replicated in rural Scotland. Sometimes, we forget about rural Scotland. We need to consider more than just the services that are deployed in towns and in the central belt, but the services that are deployed in the north, the north-east and other parts of rural Scotland where single parents may face more challenges.

We have flexible childcare services in Aberdeenshire and Angus. High-quality registered childminders are offered in a person's home. That home-based childcare is very important. When I was a single parent, I started work very early in the morning, and I needed that childcare to allow me to keep working. It is not easy to find that support in rural Scotland or even across Scotland.

Crèches are now provided all across Aberdeenshire. It is a fantastic time to be a single parent because, at last, it is recognised not only in Parliament but out in the world how valuable our single parent families are.

I will talk briefly about our work in the Equal Opportunities Committee. We began our inquiry on fathers and parenting because 8 per cent of Scotland's 165,000 single parents are fathers.

That means that around 13,000 families are headed by a single dad. The Equal Opportunities Committee took evidence on fathers and parenting, and One Parent Families Scotland brought to us fantastic evidence to help us in our work.

Some of the recommendations were about nursery staff, health visitors and how it feels to be excluded. That exclusion is particularly acute for single fathers, although it applies to single mothers, too. A single father said in a survey that society puts too many unnecessary barriers in our way. Lone parents and their children deserve better; becoming a lone father to a family is difficult enough.

One Parent Families Scotland said that the fathers it spoke to wanted to be treated as parents who have the same skills and face the same challenges as mothers. In 21st century Scotland, single parents must be treated equally to couples whatever their skills and whatever challenges they face. Families are not just about the numbers—the number of parents or children in a family should not matter.

17:32

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): I thank Christina McKelvie for securing the debate. I also thank those members who have stayed this evening to show their support for One Parent Families Scotland. I add my welcome to the members of One Parent Families Scotland who are in the gallery. I am pleased and delighted that the organisation has been recognised for its passionate work to develop further its innovative approach to family support through projects such as transforming lives, which was mentioned by Christina McKelvie; the Edinburgh dad's club, which was mentioned by Malcolm Chisholm; and the recently launched us together project, which was mentioned by Clare Adamson.

As a Government, we want to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up and to allow every child the opportunities to flourish. We want to be a more child-friendly country and to have a culture that supports all parents and carers and values their role, whatever shape their families take. Organisations such as One Parent Families Scotland are helping us to achieve that ambition.

I am pleased and proud to recognise One Parent Families Scotland's work. During my time as a minister, I have really enjoyed getting to know the organisation a bit better. I have seen its work through visits to Falkirk. Recently, I attended a conference where the speakers who absolutely stole the show were the young mums who spoke passionately about what they want to do, their

aspirations for their children and the support that they have received from One Parent Families Scotland. Like Christina McKelvie, I found those individuals' stories to be inspiring. They showed the tangible difference that the organisation makes to individual lives and families, too.

I pay particular thanks to One Parent Families Scotland because it also sits on a number of Government boards and groups and provides valuable input into our work and policy development, particularly on the ministerial advisory group for child poverty.

As we have heard this evening, One Parent Families Scotland does a number of wonderful things in key areas that make a real difference to the lives of lone parents and their families. One such area is the support that it provides to lone parents to get into employment. As many members have said, employment is a gateway that serves as the means to provide for our families. However, for some lone parents finding suitable, flexible and well-paid work can be a real challenge. Malcolm Chisholm pointed out that complexity in his contribution.

The integrated package of support that is provided by One Parent Families Scotland gives lone parents the training, information and advice that they need to make informed choices on how, where and when they work. The Scottish Government recognises the important role that flexible working plays in helping lone parents to manage the twin responsibilities of work and parenting. In order to help all parents to thrive at home and at work, we are funding a collaboration with Fathers Network Scotland, Parenting across Scotland and Working Families to try to change the way in which Scotland's parents live and work.

We are working with employers to support them in creating workplaces that encourage a better work-life balance for everyone. That is of particular relevance to Christian Allard's contribution, because it has a particular focus on fathers. I appreciate the candidness with which Christian Allard spoke of his experience as a single father and acknowledge the particular interest that he takes, through the work of the Equal Opportunities Committee, in ensuring that we do more to support fathers to contribute to the lives of their children.

As members have pointed out this evening, there is no such thing as a nuclear family any more. In 2011, there were 236,000 lone-parent households in Scotland, which equates to 11 per cent of all households in our country. It is clear that families come in all shapes and sizes and that many will need to juggle multiple responsibilities. High-quality, flexible childcare that parents can afford, as well as family-friendly working practices, are crucial to Scotland's families—whatever form those families take.

I particularly applaud the childcare services that One Parent Families Scotland provides across the country, be that its home-based service, its mobile crèche or its personalised care for children with additional needs. The provision of such flexible support is vital for Scotland's families, which is why, as a Government, we are building on our previous increase in annually funded early learning and childcare provision from 412.5 hours to 475 hours in 2007 with the further expansion to 600 hours from this August. That represents a 45 per cent increase in provision in places for three and four-year-olds since this Government came to office and is worth up to £707 per child, per year.

That further embeds flexibility, which I know is important to families across Scotland, particularly one-parent families. It is important to recognise that such policy developments often take meaningful contributions from parents themselves, and I know that One Parent Families Scotland has fed into the development of our childcare policy.

The type of support that One Parent Families Scotland provides across Scotland does not just stop at employability and childcare. The specialised service that it offers to parents to help to ensure that children are given the best possible chances in life is also worthy of note. Support for parents is absolutely key to improving outcomes for our children. We want to build the knowledge, skills and confidence of all parents so that they can be, and do, the best that they can for their kids.

Parenting skills, advocacy, mentoring, signposting and support groups are provided by One Parent Families Scotland to help parents to overcome barriers and take positive steps towards their family's future. Innovative projects such as transforming lives are invaluable and can nurture and encourage lone parents to form new relationships, friendships and networks of support.

The national parenting strategy, which was launched 18 months ago, is for all of Scotland's parents. It acknowledges that, as Christina McKelvie noted, being a mum or a dad is one of the hardest and most important jobs that anyone can take on. When we come back from the maternity unit, we do not get a handbook with that wee bundle of joy, though it could be very useful.

The challenges are even greater for families in difficult situations. Almost one in four children now lives in lone-parent households, and that figure is projected to rise further in future. We want to be certain that the right support and services exist to meet the particular needs of lone-parent families. We also want to be certain that no parent or family ever feels isolated. We want to ensure that they can access information, advice and support whenever they need it most. With an investment of £18 million, we are in the process of doing that by

promoting access to, and participation in, a comprehensive range of activities and services, and by making the best use of all the resources available in order to improve community wellbeing.

We want parents to recognise their strength and be all they can be, which is why transforming lives is so good—it is about revealing to parents the skills that they have. The term that is used so often to describe that approach is an “asset-based approach”, and I really like the way in which our former chief medical officer, Sir Harry Burns, described it as moving people from being “passive recipients of services” towards being

“active agents in their own lives.”

That is good for parents and particularly good for children, who will go on to be the parents of the future.

One Parent Families Scotland offers single parents help to develop strong relationships. We have heard about those who work in transforming lives, particularly Margaret McTaggart, who clearly goes above and beyond the call of duty, and shows just how passionate she is to help the parents in her care—Christina McKelvie and Liz Smith both made that point.

I thank Christina McKelvie and the others who contributed to the debate. I also warmly thank One Parent Families Scotland for its commitment to children and parents across Scotland, and I wish it every success for the future. Challenges remain: welfare reforms and tackling poverty pose significant challenges not only to our work in Government but to the work that is done by One Parent Families Scotland and other organisations like it across the country. We will continue to work together in partnership, using the powers that we have, to ensure that children get the very best start in life and that all parents are respected and valued for the very important role that they fulfil. Again, I thank Christina McKelvie for bringing this important topic for debate.

Meeting closed at 17:41.

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