



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 13 August 2014

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions. In order to get as many members in as possible, I would appreciate short questions and answers. Regrettably, Margaret McCulloch did not lodge question 1.

Demography (Independence)

2. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to address demographic impacts on the economy in an independent Scotland. (S4O-03462)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): With the full powers of independence, the Scottish Government will be able to achieve healthy population growth through creating both opportunities for young people to build their lives and careers within Scotland and an immigration system that best meets Scotland's needs.

In our paper "Outlook for Scotland's Public Finances and the Opportunities of Independence", we illustrate how even a modest increase in Scotland's population growth can help to strengthen Scotland's economy and could boost tax revenues by as much as £1.5 billion a year by 2029-30.

Roderick Campbell: Paragraph 4.57 of the fiscal commission working group's report states that,

"whilst there is expected to be little change in the gap between the Scottish and UK ratios over the next 15-20 years, from 2026 it is projected that without action, Scotland's dependency ratio will increase more rapidly compared to the UK".

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the key words are "without action", and can he provide further details on the action that is proposed to stem the historical flow of skilled migrants from Scotland?

John Swinney: Rod Campbell highlights the key point that those factors can be addressed. Indeed, the Scottish population has continued to

grow in recent years, and the Government wishes to invigorate that approach in order to boost the working-age population of Scotland. Among other measures, we will centre our activity on creating more employment opportunities, particularly for young people, to reduce outmigration from Scotland. We will also ensure that we create the necessary economic opportunities to attract individuals from Scotland who are living abroad as part of the worldwide diaspora. All of that will create a more vibrant economy in Scotland and will be at the heart of measures that will be taken to boost the working-age population in Scotland.

New Cancer Centre and Women's Hospital (Aberdeen) (Funding)

3. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has allocated sufficient budget to meet in full the costs of revenue funding arising from capital investment in the proposed new cancer centre and women's hospital in Aberdeen. (S4O-03463)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Those costs will not arise until future financial years, but when they do arise they will be met in full by the Scottish Government.

Lewis Macdonald: I am sure that NHS Grampian will welcome that commitment. For staff and users, the big question is when the work on the new facilities will begin and when it will be completed, given that the Government announced its intention to progress the projects earlier in the current financial year. Can Mr Swinney tell us in which financial year he anticipates that construction of those projects will begin and whether national health service staff and patients can expect to see work begin on the ground before the next election?

John Swinney: Mr Macdonald will be familiar with the financial model that we are using for the development of the cancer centre and women's hospital in Aberdeen. On 26 June, I announced the extension of the non-profit-distributing programme, and the hospital developments in Aberdeen will be part of that programme, which will run across a number of financial years culminating in 2019-20. As Mr Macdonald will know—I have made this clear to the Parliament on numerous occasions—it takes a significant period of time for projects to be prepared before they can be rolled out. It normally takes 19 to 20 months of preparation before projects can begin on site, and work will be undertaken to assess the practicalities, as some complicated issues of site development will require to be addressed in relation to the projects. Nevertheless, I give Mr

Macdonald and his constituents the absolute assurance that the developments of the women's hospital and the new cancer centre, which will form part of the Aberdeen Royal infirmary campus, are a guaranteed part of the Government's NPD programme.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I take this opportunity to welcome the investment in those facilities that the Scottish Government is making.

Can the cabinet secretary advise how much capital investment is currently being made in Aberdeen by the Scottish Government, and the background that that investment is set against?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That will be with regard to health, I presume.

John Swinney: The capital allocation for NHS Grampian in 2014-15 is £17.1 million. For the sake of completeness, I note that the capital allocation for all NHS boards for that year is £347.8 million. Of course, that is the general capital allocation, which is the part of our budget that has been under such pressure, given that it was reduced by about 26 per cent in recent years. The NPD programme has been the initiative by which the Scottish Government has tried to ensure that we boost capital expenditure in Scotland and take forward projects that ordinarily would not be able to proceed because of the limitations of our capital budget.

Scottish Enterprise Annual Review 2013-14

4. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Scottish Enterprise annual review for 2013-14. (S4O-03464)

I offer you and all members an apology for my late arrival in the chamber.

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Although Scottish Enterprise's full annual report will not be published until September, figures released in July give the welcome news that Scottish Development International has helped to create or safeguard 7,446 jobs through inward investment in the year 2013-14.

On the international trade side, SDI supported 2,708 companies to operate in international markets, including 228 that have the potential to generate £1.2 billion in international trade over the next three years.

Dennis Robertson: I thank the minister for that extremely positive response.

Does the minister agree that, with a yes vote in September, we will be able to take forward greater

opportunities to ensure that Scotland is an even more successful country?

Fergus Ewing: I agree with Mr Robertson for a number of reasons. Scotland is already a great place in which to invest. We have a highly skilled workforce, great universities and colleges, a marvellous quality of life and an extremely supportive Government and enterprise network. However, we cannot offer the additional competitive advantage that comes from having choice over things such as visas and air passenger duty. Scotland is the most expensive place in Europe to travel to because we do not have the choice to determine our own rate of air passenger duty, which means that we cannot change Scotland from a great place in which to invest into the very best place in which to invest.

Financial Forecasts (Independence)

5. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent report by Fiscal Affairs Scotland. (S4O-03465)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): The Scottish Government has set out detailed forecasts for Scotland's public finances under independence in "Scotland's Future" and in the "Outlook for Scotland's Public Finances and the Opportunities of Independence" report. That analysis demonstrates that Scotland will start life as an independent country with strong and sustainable public finances, and that, by using the powers of independence to grow our economy, we could be £5 billion per year better off by 2029-30.

Kezia Dugdale: The Fiscal Affairs Scotland report, which was published yesterday, states that, in order to be better off with independence, we need to inherit just half our population share of debt or get double the Office for Budget Responsibility's estimate of oil revenues. Which of those scenarios does the cabinet secretary think is more likely?

John Swinney: I simply refer Kezia Dugdale to the detailed report that we published some weeks ago on the outlook for public finances, which sets out our assessment of the finances of an independent Scotland and demonstrates that the fiscal position of an independent Scotland would be either identical to or very close to the position that we would be in as part of the United Kingdom.

The difference is that independence offers the people of Scotland the opportunity to change the landscape of their public finances by boosting economic activity and generating greater growth within the economy and the public finances.

I gently point out to Kezia Dugdale that the financial challenges that an independent Scotland

would start off addressing are a product not of independence but of the existing constitutional arrangements, which have delivered us a position in which we live in a country with an extraordinarily high degree of indebtedness.

Oil and Gas

6. Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the N-56 report on oil and gas. (S4O-03466)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): We welcome the new report, which endorses the Scottish Government's commitment that a new Scotland-based energy department, co-headquartered in Aberdeen and Glasgow, along with an Aberdeen-based oil and gas authority, would create the right conditions for a close, constructive and effective relationship to be forged between the Scottish Government, the OGA and the industry, creating an opportunity to realise the full potential of the oil and gas industry in Scotland.

Mark McDonald: Does the minister agree that moving the decision making closer to those in the industry who are affected by it would enable us to ensure that future decisions were more sensitive to the industry's requirements and were not about last-gasp tax grabs by the London Treasury, which we have seen on far too many occasions?

Fergus Ewing: What has been absent from the United Kingdom stewardship of the oil and gas industry is the presence of oil and gas ministers in Aberdeen.

I am on my fourth UK energy minister during my relatively short tenure of three years. Mark McDonald is absolutely correct. The industry needs a Government that spends a great deal of time to understand its needs extremely carefully. It needs a stable and predictable fiscal regime. That is precisely what it has lacked in the UK, whose stewardship has been characterised by a series of unheralded tax hikes, most recently a 12 per cent increase in the supplementary petroleum tax rate, which was introduced in 2011 without warning and seriously impaired confidence throughout the world in the oil and gas regime in the UK.

Therefore, we offer for the first time ever a Government that works with the industry closely but which understands that a stable, predictable tax regime is the absolute sine qua non of maximising recovery and achieving the maximum possible economic benefit for the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Latin as well.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The minister will be aware that, when the

First Minister spoke recently at the annual oil and gas conference in Aberdeen, he appeared to suggest that the only bit of an energy department that might be based in Aberdeen would be the oil and gas policy division. Where does he anticipate that the director and the ministers of any energy department in his plans would be based? Would they be based in Aberdeen or in Glasgow?

Fergus Ewing: We have already said that the oil and gas department will be based in Aberdeen. Of course, we have said that we would expect that energy functions such as electricity regulation would be located in Glasgow. I assume that it is not Labour policy not to want the jobs in Glasgow to do with those matters, especially since the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets and Scottish Power have their offices in Glasgow. I assume that Labour is not saying that it would take jobs away from Glasgow.

The real issue—why it is so important that we have our headquarters in Aberdeen, which is the topic of the question, and why it must be properly resourced—is what Sir Ian Wood said in his report. He said that, in the 1990s, the UK had 90 fields and 90 people in the regulatory body working on licensing. Most recently, there are 300 fields—three times as many—but 50 personnel, which is half as many.

By contrast, Norway has 200 personnel dealing with oil and gas regulation. Perhaps that is why Norway has accumulated an oil and gas fund that is worth £500 billion and the UK, like Iraq, has an oil fund of zero.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Oil and gas figures that were published this morning by the Scottish Government show that we collected £4 billion in the financial year 2013-14, which is down from £5.5 billion in 2012-13. The Scottish Government said that we were going to collect between £7 billion and £8 billion in 2013-14. Can the minister explain why the Scottish Government has got it so spectacularly wrong for the second year in a row?

Fergus Ewing: The Office for Budget Responsibility's forecasts, which are the UK's forecasts, are that 10 billion barrels of oil will be extracted between now and 2040. There are various problems with that. First, it contradicts the UK's strategy, which estimates that the recovery will be far higher than that. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let Mr Ewing answer the question, please.

Fergus Ewing: The basic flaw of Gavin Brown's analysis is that it rests on OBR figures, which are contradicted by people such as Professor Alex Kemp and by Oil and Gas UK, who indicate that the amount of gas recovered, looking forward to

2040 to 2050, will be far higher. That is in accordance with the UK's oil and gas strategy.

The oil price this morning was \$103 a barrel. That figure is extremely satisfactory—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fraser.

Fergus Ewing: —and nobody in the industry anticipates that oil will be anything other than an enormous advantage, rather than a problem, as Gavin Brown seems to think.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Will the minister advise the chamber of the Scottish Government's view that although large quantities of oil might lie beneath the sea bed of the lower Clyde, such resources cannot be explored or exploited due to the UK Government's obsession with Trident, which has led to a UK ban on such exploration and exploitation?

Fergus Ewing: I note with interest the recent comments of the former defence secretary, Michael Heseltine, which were reported in the *Sunday Post*, which give some credence to the point that Kenneth Gibson makes.

Production of oil and gas in Scotland is about to increase substantially because of new fields such as BP Clair, in which production will begin shortly and continue until beyond 2050, EnQuest's Kraken field and Statoil's Mariner field. I can run through many others: Chevron, Premier, Nexen—on and on it goes. There are new fields and extensions of existing fields, and production will increase massively over the next few years.

On new discoveries in the Clyde and elsewhere, Norway—just across the water—has seen discoveries such as the Johan Sverdrup field, which is the fifth largest field ever discovered on the Norwegian shelf. Of course it is certain that there will be more fields, more discoveries and more finds off Scotland's waters. It is not improbable that some of them will be on the scale of the Norwegian Johan Sverdrup field, ensuring enormous wealth and opportunities for the people of Scotland, especially young people, for the next half century.

What a shame it is that on every occasion the Tories and their Labour friends talk down this industry, deterring young people from seeking the enormous opportunities that exist. The Tories and their Labour friends think that this is a game, but it is not a game. For decades they have deterred young people from going into this industry by talking Scotland down. It is time that that came to an end.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I wonder whether perhaps the minister is hard of hearing. I will ask him again my colleague Gavin Brown's question. The Scottish Government's

figures, published this very morning, show that for the last financial year the revenue from North Sea oil amounts to £4 billion—precisely one half of the Scottish Government's estimated figure. Why did the Scottish Government get it so wrong?

Fergus Ewing: I dispute the mathematics that Murdo Fraser set out and the conclusions that he draws from them. It is clear that the enormous oil wealth over the next several decades will be a massive advantage, provided the right decisions are taken.

Sadly, the wrong decisions have been taken during the past 40 years. That is not just my view. It is the view of Sir Ian Wood, someone of international repute and a world leader, whose report said that if the right policy decisions are taken, the prize will be £200 billion. That is not the OBR's figure, which is a small fraction of that £200 billion. Sir Ian Wood also said that the industry believes that the stewardship of the regime has been characterised by fiscal instability and the lack of predictability, and that regulation has been so poor that an entirely new body requires to be set up to start the job afresh.

Banking and Currency (Independence)

7. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the comments by the former Royal Bank of Scotland chief executive and chairman, Sir George Mathewson, that the better together campaign's claims on banking and currency in an independent Scotland are "nonsense". (S4O-03467)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): Sir George Mathewson is one of a number of individuals who are involved in the financial services sector who have indicated that the financial services sector in Scotland will prosper with independence because we have the skills, the talent and the connections that are necessary to thrive. That is the most effective response to Mr Dornan's points.

James Dornan: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the better together position on the currency is political posturing, as predicted by the fiscal commission working group in its first report, which states:

"In that respect, it is important to acknowledge that political considerations will play a role and may cloud prerferendum comments and policy statements. However, these are likely to differ from the actual decisions taken post-referendum when agreement is likely to take place where there are common interests."

John Swinney: The fiscal commission working group anticipated the development of the current debate in its prescient remarks, to which Mr

Dornan referred. The arguments around a currency union are well stated, and the advantage is clear to see for an independent Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. There is the opportunity to ensure, as a consequence of currency arrangements that will be put in place, that businesses outwith Scotland, in the rest of the United Kingdom, are not exposed to increased costs for doing business in Scotland, which represents a significant market for the rest of the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government's position takes up the fiscal commission's arguments and demonstrates the advantages of the currency union proposition for an independent Scotland and for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The core of Sir George Mathewson's argument in the *Financial Times* piece to which the question referred is in the sentence in which he says:

"Banks such as RBS and Lloyds Banking Group have strong Scottish connections but they can scarcely be described as Scottish banks."

That is not what he used to say when he was running RBS with Fred Goodwin. What is the cabinet secretary's view? Is RBS a Scottish bank or not?

John Swinney: RBS operates across the whole United Kingdom and in a variety of different markets. A significant proportion of its activities are located outwith Scotland in other markets, particularly south of the border. The Scottish Government is, however, pleased to have RBS headquartered here in Scotland. It is a bank with strong Scottish roots, and the Scottish Government is determined to make sure that that continues.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): In the light of Sir George Mathewson's comments, why did the governor of the Bank of England today announce that emergency measures are in place to deal with currency instability if Scotland becomes independent?

John Swinney: I am glad that Annabel Goldie raised that point. The remarks that the governor made this morning represent the type of considered contribution that we have heard from him constantly during the debate. He set out the crystal clear position that, on 19 September, if Scotland has voted yes in the referendum on 18 September, the current arrangements will remain in place, and they will remain in place for some time thereafter, as the Scottish Government has said. The Bank of England will continue to undertake its functions without interruption or change from 19 September onwards throughout the transition period that the Scottish Government has set out.

The Bank of England governor did not set out emergency measures. He set out quite clearly that the Bank of England will take into account any contingency across a range of contingencies that the bank considers. His crucial point, which I welcome, is that the Bank of England has clarified beyond peradventure that it will, in the aftermath of the referendum, continue to function and exercise its existing role, as the Scottish Government has set out as being the case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has, I regret, not been lodged, but a satisfactory explanation has been provided.

Set-up Costs (Independence)

9. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its position on the set-up costs for an independent Scotland. (S4O-03469)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" explains that a number of factors will influence the size of the one-off investment that Scotland will make in the transition to independence, including the negotiations that will need to take place between the two Governments.

Since the publication of "Scotland's Future", we have of course had Professor Dunleavy's report, "Transitioning to a new Scottish state", which completely vindicates the Scottish Government's position and demolishes the figures that HM Treasury has produced.

Alison McInnes: We are told that everything is in the white paper, but I was told in response to a recent freedom of information request that the Scottish Government has done so much work on the estimates and modelling of the transition costs that the information cannot be put in the public domain because of the cost of locating, retrieving and providing it.

Will the minister now make all the information on transition costs available by placing in the Scottish Parliament information centre a copy of the estimates and modelling?

John Swinney: I am not familiar with the response to the freedom of information request to which Alison McInnes refers. The Government has set out the information on transition costs and the necessary arrangements that would have to be considered in the document, "Scotland's Future".

There has been further discussion of that, and of the input of Professor Dunleavy, which—as I indicated in my earlier answer—vindicates the Scottish Government's approach.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

The UK Treasury originally quoted Professor Dunleavy in support of its very high figure for set-up costs. However, Professor Dunleavy later accused the Treasury of

“very crude misinformation”

and

“taking our figure and making it ludicrous”.

Is the cabinet secretary aware of whether the UK Government has apologised for or retracted its figures?

John Swinney: It has not, to my knowledge, but the permanent secretary to the Treasury has indicated that the material was “misbriefed”, which is certainly a new term on me in civil service parlance.

Coal Levies (Reinstatement)

10. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in its discussions with the United Kingdom Government regarding reinstating coal levies to Scotland. (S4O-03470)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I wrote to the UK Government on 17 September last year and again on 20 November to request that royalties collected by the UK Coal Authority for coal produced in Scotland be made available now to help to fund the restoration of legacy opencast sites throughout Scotland.

A holding response was received from Michael Fallon, the UK Minister of State for Energy, on 8 January this year to say that the request was being actively pursued at that time.

I met Michael Fallon on 5 May and took the opportunity to discuss, among other matters, the coal levy issue. I received a further letter from Mr Fallon on 29 May this year, in which he stated that he was continuing to pursue the issue and that he would send me a substantive reply in due course.

We continue to pursue that line of inquiry with the UK Government.

Colin Beattie: Does the minister agree that, if the money was allocated, it could go some significant way towards funding the necessary reinstatement of former opencast coal mining sites?

Fergus Ewing: A great deal of work is being done to ensure that that objective is fulfilled over time. However, Colin Beattie is correct that the money—£15 million—that was paid from the coal industry in Scotland to the London exchequer would, if it was returned to Scotland, make an

enormous contribution to tackling a problem that is of great concern to many communities throughout the country.

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): What progress is being made on the restoration of opencast mining sites, particularly in my area of East Ayrshire, which has, as the minister is well aware, been hardest hit by the failure of coal companies to fulfil their historical obligations in that regard?

Fergus Ewing: Adam Ingram is correct—progress is being made and restoration is actively under way, with boots and machines on the ground in Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, East Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire. East Ayrshire Council is applying an extensive monitoring regime, and restoration is under way at various sites in the area, including the Netherton, Greenburn, House of Water and Duncanziemere sites. East Ayrshire Council continues to work through the process of calling bonds. We are working collaboratively with the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust on preparation of restoration plans for the legacy sites.

Of course, that progress could really be hastened if we just got a reply from the United Kingdom Government to a cross-party request that was made by the Scottish opencast mining task force. All parties in Scotland felt that the money—£15 million—should be returned to Scotland. If we cannot achieve that through a cross-party request, and if this Parliament cannot get a response from the UK Government to a request that was first made last September, I hope that many members, and not just I, will begin to conclude that it really would be better if we had control of all such matters here in Scotland.

Exports

11. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the latest figures from the Scottish index of manufactured exports, which show that there has been strong growth in Scottish-manufactured exports over the last year. (S4O-03471)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I welcome the latest figures from the Scottish index of manufactured exports, which show that the volume of manufactured export sales to overseas markets grew by 3 per cent during the first quarter of this year, with significant growth in food and drink exports and in the refined petroleum, chemical and pharmaceutical products sector.

The figures come at a time when Scottish Development International has announced that it has supported 2,708 companies in the past year,

including 228 that have the export potential to generate £1,200 million in international trade over the next three years.

Kenneth Gibson: The minister will be aware that, under the previous Labour United Kingdom Government, even before the recession struck, Scotland lost 37 per cent of its manufacturing employment, which was more than 100,000 jobs. In Ayrshire, the figure was 53 per cent, or more than 14,500 manufacturing jobs.

Does the minister agree that rebuilding a manufacturing economy with a focus on high productivity, leading to higher wages, will improve Scotland's economic growth, deliver prosperity and help to reduce inequality? Does he agree that the opportunity can be fully realised only with the full powers of independence?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I do, which might not be an enormous surprise to members.

Another point is that, with independence, we can have a different approach. For example, we can work more closely with the workforce representatives. I notice that Grahame Smith from the Scottish Trades Union Congress is in the public gallery listening to this. We can have a better, closer and more reasonable relationship in which we work together as team Scotland to build and support our manufacturing sector, which has such outstanding human resource and excellence in so many areas.

Local Government Finance (Post-referendum)

12. Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of future local government finance following the result of the referendum. (S4O-03472)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary, Derek Mackay.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): Not quite, Presiding Officer—I am a minister, but I will take that promotion, thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: My apologies.

Derek Mackay: We are currently in discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, representing our local government partners, on the local government finance settlement for next year. I expect similar discussions to continue after the referendum.

The Scottish Government's preference will always be to have a fair and equitable financial settlement for all councils that is based on local needs and that gives the maximum opportunity to deliver strong local services for local people. We

will continue to work closely with COSLA to ensure that that is achieved.

Colin Keir: The minister might be aware of reports in the *Financial Times* of 7 August that the Local Government Association in England is expected to back the scrapping of the Barnett formula. Does the minister share my view that the only threat to local public services comes from a no vote next month, which could lead to a potential £4 billion cut to the budget that is available to the Parliament?

Derek Mackay: I and the Scottish Government share that concern. A number of advocates of the no campaign keep company with those who call for a reduction in Barnett consequential to Scotland and for an overall review. It is fair to say that voting no has consequences—the double whammy to Scotland of continued austerity and a revised Barnett formula.

We can do better than Barnett by having access to our own resources through independence. The real danger to Scotland's public services is from the no campaign—better together—and continued austerity from successive United Kingdom Governments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 13 was not lodged; a satisfactory explanation was provided.

Oil and Gas Discoveries

14. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what information it has regarding the recent discoveries of oil and gas in the west of Shetland area. (S4O-03474)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Investment in west of Shetland fields such as Clair and Schiehallion is welcomed by the Scottish Government. Almost half the yet-to-find reserves are estimated to be in the region, so exploration and appraisal drilling are essential for maximising economic recovery.

To use the operator of Clair and Schiehallion as an example, the BP-operated greater Clair area is thought to hold about 7 billion barrels of oil equivalent in place. Production is expected to continue to 2050 and beyond. Furthermore, BP's wider North Sea activities highlight the positive outlook across the North Sea. Production from the Kinnoull field will start over the next few months, and Rhum is expected to restart production before the end of the year. BP and its field partners will invest about £10 billion between 2012 and 2017.

Graeme Dey: Does the minister agree that, on all the available evidence and given a consistent regulatory and fiscal regime of the kind that he touched on in answering Mark McDonald's question, the long-term future of Scotland's oil and

gas sector will be extremely bright? Does he, like me, find it unforgivable that the better together parties are intent on talking the industry down to try to ensure that the revenues that flow from oil and gas continue to line the coffers of Westminster, instead of being enjoyed by the people of Scotland, as they should be?

Fergus Ewing: I do. The simple reason why total tax revenues from oil and gas have reduced slightly over recent years is that there has been record capital investment of £13 billion to £14 billion. That investment is set against income, so it reduces taxation revenue. Unplanned shutdowns have been another source of difficulties with which the industry is grappling. Outside the Conservative, Liberal and Labour parties, everybody knows that revenue and production will increase substantially in the next few years.

We are talking about what is happening with the oil off the shores of Scotland, but the icing on the cake is that, last year, Scottish oil and gas companies generated more revenue—£10 billion—from international work. Not only do we have enormous resources to exploit here for the next half century, but we are now world leaders in areas such as subsea. That will bring the country enormous opportunities, provided that the right policies are pursued.

Tourism (2014 Events)

15. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact on tourism has been of the various events across the country in 2014. (S4O-03475)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The full detail on visitor numbers and expenditure in 2014 will be available in spring next year, but we already know that visitor expenditure was up 4 per cent in the 12-month period to March 2014 in comparison with the previous 12-month period; that 890,000 people attended funded events in our homecoming programme between January and May; and that the hugely successful Commonwealth games saw 1.2 million tickets sold. We look forward to receiving the independent research on visitor numbers in the Commonwealth games highlight report, which will be published later this week.

We have all that and many more events to come, such as the Ryder cup and over 300 more homecoming events, including Highland homecoming, the Forth bridges festival, the Royal National Mod and the MTV Europe music awards.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief, Mr Adam, and please be brief in response, Mr Ewing.

George Adam: Does the minister agree that the Commonwealth games showed the world Scotland

at its best? Does he agree that that and all the other events that will come to Scotland can have only a positive impact on our tourism industry?

Fergus Ewing: I will be brief. Scotland is the place to be and Scotland is the place where people have been. [*Laughter.*]

Progressive Workplace Policies

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on working together: progressive workplace policies in Scotland. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement; there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

14:40

The Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment (Angela Constance):

Over the course of the past two years there has been clear and sustained strengthening in the Scottish economy. In the first quarter of this year the economy moved back to above pre-recession levels, and today's labour market statistics show that our recovery is continuing to gain momentum. Unemployment is down and employment is at its highest level ever. Female employment continues to increase and is at its highest level since records began, and the female unemployment rate is at its lowest since May to July 2009.

Youth employment has increased and fewer young people are unemployed in Scotland than was the case a year ago. I welcome the drop in youth unemployment that today's figures show. It is important that all our young people have the chance to get a foothold in the labour market, and we want the unemployment figure to continue to decrease.

The Scottish Government's aim is to do better than simply return to pre-recession levels of economic performance. Even in the supposed good times before the recession, Scotland's youth unemployment rate was 13.2 per cent and the United Kingdom's rate was 14.3 per cent, whereas there were rates of just 5.9 per cent in the Netherlands, 7.4 per cent in Norway and 7.5 per cent in Denmark. We can and must do better.

It will take time, but building a labour market and economy that are resilient, adaptable and responsive to change will be key to ensuring that Scotland's businesses compete internationally, delivering long-term prosperity and high-quality jobs. We need to ensure that we support the type of growth that reduces inequalities and helps everyone—not just the people who are closest to the labour market—to realise their potential. We need growth that reduces disparities between different parts of Scotland. We need growth that is sustainable and resilient and that focuses on maximising returns from work.

Through existing devolved powers, the Scottish Government has taken forward a range of ambitious initiatives, including opportunities for all,

investment in childcare, sustained investment in and reform of education, record numbers of modern apprenticeships, and programmes such as community jobs Scotland and the youth employment Scotland fund, to meet the challenges that we face.

Of course, we will do more. For example, by implementing the recommendations of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce we will deliver world-class vocational education and training, to support sustainable employment and boost productivity. I announced £4.5 million of funding in an early response to the recommendations. We share the commission's aspiration to reduce youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2020.

Scotland's economy will achieve its full potential only when we maximise the quality as well as the quantity of work, offering equality of opportunity to grow and apply skills and boost business productivity. We need to embed progressive workplace policies.

I therefore welcome the publication of the report, "Working Together Review: Progressive Workplace Policies in Scotland". I am grateful to all the members of the review group: Chris Parr, Mary Grant, Sue Bruce, Mary Alexander, Lilian Macer, Grahame Smith and Professor Patricia Findlay. I am particularly grateful to the review group's chair, Jim Mather.

The review group was asked to review progressive workplace policies in the public and private sectors, to identify opportunities for innovation that would enhance productivity, and to highlight good practice and recommend how we build on it to optimise the relationships that link trade unions, employers and Government.

As expected, the report is substantive.

The recommendation section says:

"Our report provides a great deal of evidence which confirms that many unions, employees and employers are already reaping the benefits of working together to construct their own business or sector specific approaches to modern, co-operative industrial relations. We welcome that evidence and recognise that it is one of Scotland's existing economic strengths. We are ambitious to build on that success."

I fully endorse that statement.

The Scottish Government regards trade unions as key social partners that play an important role in sustaining effective democracy in society, particularly in the workplace, and sees the existence of good employment practices as a key contributor to economic competitiveness and social justice. Although some may not share that view, engaging and empowering employees is widely recognised as a key success factor.

The report challenges businesses and employers, trade unions members and officials and Government to learn, adapt and evolve. It identifies four action priorities: building capacity; on-going dialogue; real partnership opportunities; and a willingness to learn from what works.

The Scottish Government will fully consider the report and the recommendations, engaging business and trade unions directly, and will prepare a formal response.

I will highlight elements of the report that resonate with "Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland" and "A Jobs Plan for an Independent Scotland", which was published yesterday.

We want Scotland to be an innovative, high-wage and high-productivity economy that competes in international markets and focuses on high-value goods and services. Independence will provide greater opportunities to build a new economic framework that better utilises our unique strengths and delivers a more outward-focused and resilient economy. Under independence, the Scottish Government would have greater access to levers to support the labour market.

I am pleased that the working together review, while adopting a neutral position on the referendum—and rightly so—has, at recommendation 11, endorsed a fair employment framework. I welcome the proposed focus on supporting and encouraging diversity in all its forms in the workplace, particularly for women and young people. I endorse the importance of capturing and applying evidence of what works, and of promoting on-going dialogue at workplace, sectoral and national levels, as detailed in recommendations 19 and 20.

The independent body proposed by the review to lead joint work by unions, employers and Government that boosts productivity and sustainable economic growth adds weight to our plans for a fair work commission and a linked national convention on employment and labour relations. Adopting an inclusive, innovative and holistic approach will promote change for the better—and stronger social partnerships will drive that forward.

Progressive workplace policies can help to improve firms' productivity and innovation and aid sustainable growth. Well-rewarded and sustained employment is the best route out of poverty and the best way to tackle inequality. That is what I want for Scotland's future.

I conclude by reiterating that the Scottish Government is most certainly for trade unions, because of all that they contribute to workplaces, to communities across Scotland, to wider civic society and to innovation, productivity and

economic growth. It is most certainly for business, because business delivers jobs and the economic growth that underpins opportunities for all. It is most certainly for fair work and good employment practices. Finally, it is most certainly for independence.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. I also thank our colleagues in the trade unions and in industry for their work on the report.

Today's employment figures are to be welcomed. They show that economic growth in the country is steady as part of the United Kingdom, but all of us in the chamber want the country to do better. I commend the cabinet secretary's ambition to deliver world-class vocational education, and I reiterate my welcome for the £4.5 million of funding. However, I wonder when the detail on how that money will be spent will be made available for us to scrutinise.

As Labour said in response to the publication of the Wood commission's report, it is difficult for us to square the Government's laudable words on vocational education with its funding priorities to date. Colleges have had a raw deal from the Scottish Government. There are 140,000 fewer students at college than there were in 2007, including 80,000 fewer women.

I repeat to the cabinet secretary that a target of reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2020 is far too modest. Our Government should have a much higher target for tackling the scourge of youth unemployment. How does the 40 per cent target square with the announcement that John Swinney made at the weekend that there would be full employment in an independent Scotland? I am confused about why she is announcing a target of reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent when John Swinney would find jobs for 100 per cent of our young people in an independent Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: And your question is?

Jenny Marra: What is the Government's real target on the vital issue of jobs for our young people?

Angela Constance: I was half expecting a question from Ms Marra on the Government's response to the working together review. I appreciate that the Government has had the report of the review for only a few days, but it is a highly significant report that is the result of six months' work. It is a 70-page document in which 30 far-reaching recommendations are made.

In relation to the £4.5 million that I announced to make early progress on the work of the

commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, details of that were made available some time ago. Much of that money is to go on things such as foundation apprenticeships, tackling occupational segregation and supporting Education Scotland in its new roles. If Ms Marra would like further detail or has detailed questions on that, we can supply that information to her.

As regards Ms Marra's swipe at the college system in Scotland, I remind her—before I answer the substantive question about full employment—that we are investing more in further education than any previous Administration, and we now have a funding floor. It is also worth remembering that women are not underrepresented in further education and that the additional funding of £6 million that we supplied for additional part-time places was focused on women returners to the labour market.

For the record, I make it clear that I have campaigned for and believed in full employment all my life, and that I want this Parliament to have job-creating powers that will bring about that full employment.

As far as the recommendation about reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2020 is concerned, I thought that the Labour Party had been calling for targets for the past two years. I remind Ms Marra that that target came from the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce. The intention was to move us from being in the top 10 economies when it comes to young people to being in the top five. I hope that there is unanimity in the chamber in supporting full employment. I contend that we would have far greater prospects of achieving full employment in this country if we had a Parliament with full job-creating powers.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement, and I commend the members of the review group for their work.

All of us support the aim of improving industrial relations, although it is fair to say that, with a few high-profile exceptions, we in Scotland generally have a good record in that area in recent years. It is disappointing that the cabinet secretary chose to use her announcement to seek to further the case for independence—that is perhaps not surprising, at this point—but it would have been better if she had just tried to build some consensus.

I have three brief questions. First, the review proposes the establishment of a new independent body to lead joint work by unions, employers and Government. Although that idea may have some merit, do we really need another quango to progress that work?

Secondly, recommendation 21 of the review group asks the Scottish Government to use procurement rules to promote a living wage. I thought that we had had that debate during consideration of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, and I thought that the Government had told us that it would not be legal to do that. I wonder why no one seems to have told the review group.

Thirdly, recommendation 24 asks the Scottish Government to legislate to ensure that there is worker representation on the boards of all public sector bodies. If the Government is to consider that, I suggest that it should also consider the issue of representation on such boards of consumers or service users.

Angela Constance: It will of course come as no surprise to Mr Fraser that I and this Government are proponents of independence, but what I find very interesting is his articulation of the need to seek consensus. We in this Government very much believe in social partnership and in paying tribute and credit to the trade union movement, which has made a massive contribution to this country's economy as well as wider civic gains.

Our approach to social partnership and industrial relations can be contrasted very positively with the approach of the UK Government. The Carr review seems to have stumbled and failed, and it is interesting to note that, because of what has been called the very febrile atmosphere in the run-up to the UK general election, it will now produce a much briefer report that will make no recommendations.

Despite the fact that we have all been engaged in the most historic campaign leading up to the vote on 18 September, this Government and this country have still been able to support a body of work that is all about finding consensus and a way forward and about building a real, lasting and meaningful social partnership that must involve not only trade unions but employers. We can stand proudly by our record.

I am very sympathetic to the creation of a stakeholder body. I see it not as another quango but as an essential forum for creating a win-win situation for employers and workers the length and breadth of the country. Anyone who believes in social justice and sustainable economic growth must see social partnership and an on-going dialogue and working together between bodies as part of such a vision.

With regard to procurement and recommendation 21, I am sure that Mr Fraser is aware that we are consulting on statutory guidance that will be issued as a result of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. That part of the legislation is indeed welcome and will

allow us to consider as part of the procurement process wider workforce issues such as people's terms and conditions and their pay. That will be very important for the standards of living of people who are struggling with the rising costs of living, and it will also benefit our economy and business.

My final point is that, on my travels as part of this and my previous portfolio, I have met many progressive employers. Indeed, most employers recognise the importance of progressive workplace policies to the success of their businesses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As many members wish to ask questions this afternoon, succinct questions and answers will be welcome.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that in the wake of the banking crash Westminster froze the minimum wage, which forced some of Scotland's hardest pressed families to bear the burden of Westminster's economic mismanagement. Is she able to confirm that any future independent Scottish Government of which she is a part will ensure that the minimum wage always keeps pace with inflation?

Angela Constance: Yes. Ensuring that the minimum wage is uprated by the retail prices index and keeps pace with the cost of living would be a key priority and indeed a key plank of the work that would be taken forward by a fair work commission.

It is worth noting that, come October, 150,000 people in Scotland will be on the living wage, 100,000 of whom are women. If the minimum wage had kept pace with the cost of living, those 100,000 women would be nearly £700 better off. I see fair pay as a mark of a civic society and something on which we could build and make a lot of progress.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): In her statement, the cabinet secretary said:

"Scotland's economy will achieve its full potential only when we maximise the quality as well as the quantity of work".

I can only agree with those fine words. However, Murdo Fraser is right: we could have taken a real step in that direction by guaranteeing, not guiding, the introduction of the living wage and banning zero-hours contracts for all workers on publicly funded contracts. Why on earth would the cabinet secretary and her colleagues not work together with us and the trade unions to make that happen?

Angela Constance: It is unfortunate that Mr Gray seems to have a short memory. My recollection is that he and trade union colleagues of all of us worked very closely with the Government. Although there was a disagreement

about what was and was not possible under European Union legislation, considerable progress was made under the procurement legislation and in the fact that the Deputy First Minister's proposed amendments included the living wage.

Of course we all live with the difficulty that we have a national minimum wage that is enforceable in law that is much lower than the living wage, which is not enforceable in law.

Jenny Marra: The SNP did not vote for the minimum wage when Labour made it law.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Marra!

Angela Constance: There was very clear guidance on that from Commissioner Barnier.

It is a shame that we cannot recognise where progress has been made. Procurement must be used as a power of good and to improve the working conditions for people throughout this country.

The debate has moved forward. We will always look to see what more we can do, and the consultation on the statutory guidance is very important.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): The report by the Jimmy Reid Foundation entitled "Working Together: A vision for industrial democracy in a Common Weal economy" tells us:

"The country with the strongest worker participation rate according to the"

EU participation index

"is Denmark ... The high levels of worker-participation in Denmark can be attributed to three factors: the strength of trade-union rights and collective bargaining agreements, the co-operation committees of employers and employees and worker participation on management boards."

Can the cabinet secretary reassure me and the workers of an independent Scotland that that commonweal approach, along with the measures that are outlined in today's report, will be looked at very closely as a possible model for the highest standards of employee-employer relations?

Angela Constance: In the interests of the Presiding Officer's patience and of brevity, I simply concur with the tone and tenor of Ms McKelvie's question. When people get a chance to read the report in depth, they will see for themselves the evidence—not just international evidence, but evidence from across Scotland—that speaks of the strength of things such as collective bargaining and partnership working.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): As a former board member of Scottish union learning, I am particularly interested in and thankful for the review group's recommendations on workplace

learning. Union learning is a great example of how trade unions add value to work in Scotland.

Industrial relations require two to tango, of course, and there are good and less interested employers in Scotland. Why does the cabinet secretary believe that business in Scotland will be more likely to support workplace learning after independence? If that is not automatic, what specific steps would she intend to take to encourage engagement from business to meet its skills obligations?

Angela Constance: Mr Smith is right to say that there is nothing inevitable about the relationships and the conduct between people and interested parties, but it is important to recognise the considerable achievements of not only the trade union movement but employers throughout Scotland. I firmly believe from consulting a whole host of stakeholders that there is a real appetite in Scotland for a social partnership framework and taking things forward.

I am very pleased that Drew Smith has shown an interest in Scottish union learning, for which I have a particular portfolio responsibility. Scottish union learning has certainly thrived under the Government, and we remain very committed to it.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): In an independent Scotland, will the Scottish Government give a commitment to end current UK employment practices that see people—in particular, young people—being exploited through low wages and poor conditions of service?

Angela Constance: I very much regret that employment law remains reserved to the UK. I know that Willie Coffey has written to me about the experiences of one of his young constituents, whose experience was very similar to that of a young constituent of mine. Both were subjected to exploitative practices and extremely poor pay.

Although employment law is currently not devolved to this Parliament, I have taken action with Skills Development Scotland to ensure that young people can access better employment advice. I pay tribute to the youth committee of the Scottish Trades Union Congress and all the work that it has done in that regard.

Fair work for all, irrespective of age, will be a key plank of the work that a fair work commission takes forward.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): Recommendation 24 of the report is to keep in mind in particular

“the need to increase the number of women on the Boards of public sector bodies.”

I whole-heartedly agree with that, of course. Given that recommendation, can the cabinet secretary explain why the nominations to the Scottish Government's fiscal commission did not support the policy that women should make up 40 per cent of the membership of public boards?

Angela Constance: This Government is certainly leading by example, and has 40 per cent female representation in the Cabinet. It would be fair to say that the Cabinet is Scotland's company board. I am glad to see that the UK Government has followed where we have led and has increased the number of women at very senior level in the UK Government.

I must apologise because I did not answer part of Murdo Fraser's question in relation to recommendation 24, but I will sweep that up now in my reply to Jim Hume. Recommendation 24 states:

“The Scottish Government should legislate to ensure that there is effective worker representation (from representative trade unions) on the board of every public sector body”.

We will certainly take a close look at that recommendation. We will take it seriously and investigate it because it chimes very clearly with our aspirations and plans to increase representation of women on boards in Scotland. We have laid out our intentions, and our ability and desire to legislate, should we be required to do so.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): The UK Government's austerity policies and welfare cuts are hitting women hardest. Does the cabinet secretary agree that Scotland would see clear economic benefits from increasing participation by women in the workplace, and from reducing the gender pay gap that exists in some professions?

Angela Constance: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the “Working Together Review” report have made a very salient point about inequality. When we debate inequality, we often talk about it in terms of welfare reform, cuts or tax policies—rightly so—but we must not forget to say that well rewarded, high-quality work is actually the best route out of poverty.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and for the direction of travel that she has indicated in terms of progressive and sustainable employment. The concept of decent work is one that we can unite around, although I observe that it stands in contrast to the Government support that is given to union-avoiding and tax-avoiding companies such as Amazon. Will the minister introduce progressive policies that are supported by Labour, such as wage ratios and minimising the salary differentials between the highest and the lowest paid people?

Angela Constance: I will look at the detail of any recommendations that Ken Macintosh wishes to forward to me. On a note of consensus, perhaps I will unite with Mr Macintosh and say that I agree that everybody should pay their tax and that sometimes tax enforcement is as much an issue as disagreements about tax policy.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Public sector workers have been under sustained attack from Westminster Governments over recent years, whether on their pay or their pensions. I think that that can be halted only by independence. However, does the cabinet secretary agree that by putting public employee representatives on all public sector boards we could give workers a real voice, and give the public improved services?

Angela Constance: One of the gains of devolution and, indeed, of the trade union movement in this country is the fact that we have a no compulsory redundancies policy in the public sector. To directly answer Maureen Watt's question, employee representation at director level and non-executive level in national health service boards has proved to be very successful, not just in terms of there being a more collegiate workforce, but in managing change and communicating with the workforce. I believe that it has also delivered benefits to patients.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the minister for her statement, which acknowledged the importance of sustaining democracy in the workplace, as does recommendation 17 in the report, which seeks to give the proposed new body a role in increasing democracy in the workplace. Is it a policy objective of the Scottish Government to increase workplace democracy? If so, how will that be integrated into the range of business support services and grant schemes, such as regional selective assistance, given the notorious track record of a company like Amazon, for example?

Angela Constance: We have a policy position of supporting workplace democracy and participation. As a Government we have, of course, to reply to the detail of the extensive report. I add that recommendation 17 is very much linked to recommendation 10, in relation to how we get the infrastructure for social partnership.

I leave Patrick Harvie with a quotation, from page 11 of the report, that I believe is hugely significant. It states:

"A number of recent initiatives undertaken by the Scottish Government and others suggest that there is a growing appreciation that what happens in the workplace is as important, in its influence on economic activity, performance, growth, and inequality, as macro-economic factors"

It adds that that gives us

"greater scope for intervention in workplace practice"

that will make a difference to working lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): That concludes the statement on "Working Together Review: Progressive Workplace Policies in Scotland".

Welfare

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-10777, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare.

15:11

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Debates on welfare always provoke in me, as I am sure they do in many others in the chamber, conflicting emotions. First, I feel a sense of regret that our welfare state, which is so often held up as one of the defining achievements of the union, is being systematically dismantled, causing real and additional hardship to those in society who most need our help. There is now strong evidence that the Tories' so-called welfare reforms are failing people right across Scotland and that their cuts are having a devastating impact on some of the most vulnerable individuals, families and communities in our society. Indeed, when the Secretary of State for Scotland said, as he did in April, that we are part of "a fantastic system", he demonstrated just how out of touch he and indeed the other unionist parties are on these vital issues. Regret and a heavy heart are what I inevitably bring to any debate on welfare.

However, standing as we are just five weeks from the referendum, I also feel a real sense of hope. We have before us a precious opportunity to change course and build, not overnight but over time, a social security system that meets our needs—one that supports the needs of our economy by equipping people better for the world of work, one that supports the needs of individuals by ensuring that those who work get a decent wage for the job that they do and one that supports the needs of the vulnerable by ensuring that we have the decent safety net that I believe, and I know many people agree, is one of the hallmarks of a civilised society.

Today's debate is an opportunity to crystallise the choice that is on offer—the choice between, on the one hand, increasing austerity and division under the present system and, on the other, a different, better, more progressive and more supportive path with independence.

As people consider the choice that will be before them on 18 September, they should do so in the knowledge that further Westminster cuts are still to come—cuts that will impact most on women, children and the disabled. As people consider that choice, I am confident that the policies that we have outlined and the vision that we put forward

will encourage them to vote to take these powers into our own hands.

A perfect illustration of that choice, and a topic that we have discussed many times before in the Parliament, is the bedroom tax. Yesterday, the Welfare Reform Committee considered and, I am glad to say, agreed to support the section 63 order to transfer to the Scottish ministers the power over expenditure on discretionary housing payments. That welcome step means that we can now ensure that no person in Scotland need be adversely affected by the bedroom tax. However, it is, is it not, a democratic outrage that a tax that had no political or popular support in Scotland was ever introduced here in the first place?

Make no mistake: all that we are able to do with the bedroom tax is mitigate. We can only take money from other parts of the Scottish budget to mitigate a policy that, had this Parliament had a say, would never have been introduced. A section 63 order will not end the bedroom tax; only by this Parliament having the power to decide will we be able to do what the majority—I believe the vast majority—of people in Scotland want, which is to abolish the bedroom tax.

That is the nub of the debate that we are having today. With the United Kingdom parties now battling to outdo each other on how tough they can be on welfare, it is becoming clear that independence is the only way for us to achieve a system that treats people with dignity and respect. In "Scotland's Future" we set out a vision and a range of measures that will start to ensure that we have a welfare system that is more suited to Scottish needs. We have said clearly that, if there is a yes vote, we will halt the roll-out of the universal credit and personal independence payments, we will abolish the bedroom tax and we will ensure that welfare payments increase in line with inflation to avoid the poorest families—those in our society with the least—being plunged deeper into poverty. We will increase the carers allowance to recognise the contribution that carers make and to end the situation whereby carers currently get the lowest rate of benefit of everyone who claims benefits.

All those policies will directly and positively impact on people's financial circumstances and on their quality of life. If there is a no vote, no matter how hard we try—and we will—we will be unable to stop the rise in poverty that Westminster policies will cause.

There is no doubt that the impact is being felt most by the most vulnerable people—in particular, those with health conditions and disabilities. Rather than helping to support individuals, Westminster is ploughing on with flawed systems such as the work capability assessment, which has now been reviewed five times. I warmly

welcome the report by the expert working group on welfare, which recommends that the current work capability assessment be scrapped. The Government has committed to doing that when the powers to do so are in our hands.

Just this morning, we have published a research paper that lays bare the impact of the UK Government's reforms on disabled people. It finds that disabled people in Scotland are likely to experience significant and disproportionate loss of income due to the Westminster cuts. It is expected that, of the 190,000 existing claimants of disability living allowance who will be reassessed for personal independence payments, more than 100,000 will lose some or all of their disability benefits by 2018, with a loss of at least £1,100 each a year. People who get enhanced mobility support could lose up to £3,000 a year. Important though the money is, let us remember that, for people in those circumstances, that loss could take away more than pounds and pence—it could take away their very independence. In my view, making cuts of that magnitude on the backs of disabled and sick people is flatly wrong, and I believe that it is time that we got the powers to do something about it.

Independent research has recently concluded that the cumulative impact of welfare reforms on income is particularly severe for households with disabled children and adults, at about £1,500 per year on average. That impact is more than double the average reduction faced by non-disabled households, although we all know that disabled people are already more likely to be in poverty and face higher costs of living than non-disabled people. It beggars belief that, in modern Scotland, we are prepared to stand by and watch the situation get worse.

Although disabled people are being hit disproportionately, they are not alone in bearing the brunt. We know from children's charities that up to 100,000 more children will be pushed into poverty by 2020 if we stay on the Westminster path. In March, we published our child poverty strategy, which set out the progress that we are making on childcare, education and youth unemployment. It showed that, since devolution, under the current Administration and the previous one, there has been a real improvement in the rates of child poverty in Scotland, which is to be welcomed. We may disagree about the best way to combat child poverty, but everyone in the Parliament is united in wanting to see it eradicated within a generation. However, the latest figures show that the reduction in poverty that we have seen in recent years is now being reversed. Westminster cuts such as the reduction in in-work tax credits are reducing incomes for some of our poorest households.

As we always should, we will do everything possible in our power to ensure that no child lives in poverty or grows up in poverty. However, the bottom line is this: when policies from Westminster are taking us in the wrong direction, when they are undermining all our efforts and are cancelling out all that this Parliament is able to do, the case for us to take these decisions ourselves becomes overwhelming. By doing that, we can combine what we are already doing on education and support for young people with progressive policies on employment, welfare and benefits. With that approach, we can begin to make inroads into not only mitigating poverty but alleviating it for good. It will take time, effort and determination, but we will have the powers and the access to our vast resources—we are, after all, one of the richest countries in the world—that we need in order to make it possible. That has got to be so much better than standing by, powerless, while Westminster does its damage to the most vulnerable and to the very fabric of our society.

I want to start to draw my remarks to a close today by posing some questions specifically to my colleagues on the Labour benches. Labour's Tory and Liberal Democrat partners in the no campaign support the welfare policies of the Westminster Government. I profoundly disagree with them, but at least I know where they stand. Today, I am pretty sure that Labour members will claim that they do not support the policies of the current Westminster Government. They will say—I suspect more in hope than in any serious expectation—that the answer to the problem is not independence but a stronger Scottish Parliament and a Labour Government at Westminster. Taking that at face value, I want to give Labour the opportunity to answer a couple of straight questions.

The questions that I would like Jackie Baillie to answer are these. First, short of a yes vote, what new powers is the Parliament guaranteed to get that will allow us to stop the assault on the incomes of the disabled, of women and of children? Secondly, even if there is a Labour Government at Westminster, which Jackie Baillie cannot guarantee, what will that Labour Government do differently on welfare, apart from abolishing the bedroom tax? What, precisely, is Ed Miliband going to do that is different from what David Cameron is already doing? Will Labour halt the roll-out of personal independence payments? Will Labour protect the disabled from the cuts that I have outlined, which they stand to face if personal independence payments go ahead, or is the reality that the disabled will face exactly the same cuts under Labour as they do under the Tories? These are important questions if we are to crystallise the choice that faces people on 18 September.

If Jackie Baillie is about to get up and say that, like me, she opposes these cuts but then argue that getting our hands on the decision-making powers is not the best way to address them, I put it to everyone in the chamber that she needs to be extremely specific about what Labour in Westminster will do instead, and then she needs to tell us what will happen if we end up with another Tory Government after all. I suspect—although I hope that I am wrong—that, at the end of her speech, we will still be waiting for those answers. That will prove that, whether the next UK Government is Labour or Tory, if we vote no, the outlook for the most vulnerable in our society will be exactly the same.

It is clear that, under successive Administrations, the UK Government has failed to deliver the changes that are needed to deliver a welfare system that is fair for all. Not only that, the so-called reforms that are currently under way are likely to make the situation worse. It is only with independence that we can create in Scotland a social security system that is fair and treats people with dignity and respect. It is only this Government and this Parliament that can stand in the way of Westminster implementing further measures that will cause poverty—particularly child poverty—to increase. The only way we can guarantee the powers to stop that happening is to take the power to decide those matters into our own hands, so that the future of our welfare system is decided not by Tory Governments in Westminster but here in this Parliament and we can build a better, fairer and more equal society.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the damaging and destructive impact of the UK Government's welfare policies on women, children, disabled people and communities across Scotland; further notes that the worst of the cuts are still to come and that all three of the main UK unionist parties are determined to pursue this cuts agenda; recognises that an additional 100,000 children will be pushed into poverty, after housing costs, by 2020 as a result of these policies; also recognises that, by 2018, thousands of disability living allowance (DLA) claimants in Scotland will lose some or all their disability benefits as a result of the replacement of DLA with the personal independence payment; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has pledged to halt the roll-out of universal credit and personal independence payments, and recognises that only with the full powers of independence can the UK Government welfare cuts be halted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I point out to members that we are tight for time this afternoon.

15:25

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I find that speech astonishing from a party that cannot even tell us what currency benefits will be paid in. I will take absolutely no lessons from Nicola Sturgeon, whose boss encouraged people to vote Liberal at

the previous general election—look where that got us.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: Sit down. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome the opportunity to debate welfare because it was Labour in the post-war austerity years that was bold in its thinking and created the welfare state and the national health service. I am clear—and Nicola Sturgeon is right—that we are witnessing the destruction of that welfare state by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Government.

There is no doubt in my mind that the consequences of the Tories' so-called reform of the welfare system are, to be frank, appalling. We do not need to look far to find examples of people being treated inhumanely. Whether it is sanctions driving people to food banks or people waiting months and months for their personal independence payments, the distress is self-evident. It is not just those who are unemployed who need help. There are increasing numbers of people at food banks who are employed but in low-paid jobs. We are facing a cost-of-living crisis the likes of which has not been seen for decades. Wages are flatlining or declining and the price of everyday items is going up—a staggering 25 per cent in the past five years alone—so just getting by is increasingly difficult.

I believe that there is a shared analysis about the extent of the misery caused by Conservative policies for those who are disabled, unemployed or in low-paid jobs and that the majority in the chamber reject what can only be described as an ideologically driven attack on some of the poorest in our society, but the real question is what we do about it.

For the Scottish National Party, the answer is independence. That is its answer to every question, no matter what the question is. When Labour was building the welfare state, the answer was independence; when we were creating the NHS, the answer was independence; and now, as families face a cost-of-living crisis, the answer again is simply independence.

The truth is that people in Scotland are caught between two Governments with the wrong priorities. Obsession with the constitution blinds the Scottish Government and prevents it from taking action now. We can provide people with much-needed help now. We have the power to do so. It is criminal not to use it.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: No.

We can, of course, vote the Tories out and return a Labour Government in 2015, which is the quickest route to making a difference to people's lives.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: No, I think that you should sit and listen.

I welcome the efforts of the expert group on welfare.

Kevin Stewart: Will Jackie Baillie give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way.

Jackie Baillie: To be frank, I expected more detail and a better understanding of costings from the SNP Government. For many years—

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: No.

For many years now, the SNP has argued for the transfer of power over welfare, but the bulk of the expert group's recommendations will not be considered until after the referendum. As with much else in the SNP's proposals for independence, there is a lack of clarity, a lack of certainty and considerable risk. People in Scotland deserve better than a cross-your-fingers-and-hope-for-the-best approach to welfare and the future of the country.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: I will take an intervention in a minute.

In a recent YouGov poll, 79 per cent of Scots said that they wanted their pensions to be the same across the UK, as did 75 per cent of people for welfare. They agreed that pooling and sharing our resources across 63 million people rather than 5 million people makes sense. Like us, they believe in something bigger than independence: they believe in social solidarity across the UK. They want the pensioner in Liverpool to be paid the same as the pensioner in Linlithgow, the disabled person in Dundee to get the same support as the disabled person in Doncaster, and the child who is poor in Gateshead to be cared about just as much as the child who is poor in Glasgow.

I will take an intervention from Nicola Sturgeon if she can tell me why 79 per cent of Scots are wrong.

Nicola Sturgeon: What Jackie Baillie sets out is why people all over the UK should lose the same amount in benefit under the Tories. I have a very—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: We set out today how the move to personal independence payments will cost 100,000 disabled people more than £1,000 a year. Will Labour halt the roll-out of personal independence payments—yes or no?

Jackie Baillie: That clearly was a speech, rather than a question. The cabinet secretary has set herself against the 79 per cent of Scots who believe in something bigger than independence.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. Clearly Ms Baillie is not taking an intervention.

Jackie Baillie: Let me deal with the carers allowance. It is right that we recognise carers' contribution to society and provide them with support. The cabinet secretary acknowledges that increasing the carers allowance alone is no substitute for the range of other services that carers use, such as respite. However, it is disappointing that the Scottish Government chose to spin the announcement, saying that 102,000 carers would be better off, costing almost £60 million. The cabinet secretary knows that that is just not true. The Scottish Government failed to explain that any carer who is in receipt of benefit would have carers allowance offset against that. In other words, they would not receive that extra money. The true figure, supplied by the Office for National Statistics, is 57,000. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackie Baillie: It is often said that the SNP overclaims and underdelivers, and here is an unfortunate example of it doing just that.

There is very little in the paper that has been costed. I look forward to the cabinet secretary telling me the costings, because without a price tag this is nothing more than a wish list. First, the set-up costs for the IT system are estimated to be £300 million to £400 million. Yesterday the cabinet secretary tried to suggest that we could use the UK system, just like Northern Ireland, forgetting of course that Northern Ireland is going to remain in the UK, while we would be a foreign country—and we might not even have the same currency.

Nicola Sturgeon rose—

Jackie Baillie: In addition, if we used the UK system, it would mean that she could not make the changes that she says she wants to make. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, can I stop you a moment, please? If members are not taking interventions, other members who are trying

to intervene should resume their seats immediately.

Jackie Baillie: Secondly, experts suggest that the cost of proposals for carers allowance, the bedroom tax and stopping the roll-out of PIPs would be at least £350 million. That would be £350 million extra on the social security bill each year. There is no detail of how we would pay for that. Instead, we have seen that there would be tax cuts for big business, the cost of which would be borne by the poorest in our society.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member give way? Is that a no?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order!

Jackie Baillie: Other proposals such as universal credit—uncosted. Uprating benefits to meet the cost of living—admirable but uncosted. Replacing DLA and PIP—uncosted. There is the very real prospect of reassessing disabled people as they transition from one benefit to another, causing even more distress—something that the cabinet secretary did not deny when questioned. No costs, no detail—just vague promises about how it will all be better.

It does not take constitutional change; it takes political will.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No.

Even where the SNP has control of welfare it has not delivered. The Scottish welfare fund—underspent, at a time when the need is clear. It has taken one year to drag the SNP kicking and screaming into the chamber to mitigate the bedroom tax.

Members: Oh!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackie Baillie: I am pleased that the cabinet secretary said yesterday that there is nothing to prevent local authorities from backdating to help those in arrears of bedroom tax from last year. That is a welcome U-turn on the SNP's previous position.

When it comes to tackling poverty, the SNP has a record. It has stripped £1 billion from programmes to tackle poverty. It underspent its budget on fuel poverty, when the number of households in fuel poverty is at 900,000, which is an all-time high.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her last minute.

Jackie Baillie: It refused to take action on the living wage through procurement when it had a chance to do so. Its actions speak louder than its words.

Experts say that the first post-independence Scottish Parliament will face a £6 billion deficit: £6 billion cut from public spending on such things as schools, hospitals and welfare.

Labour has an ambitious programme. We will increase the minimum wage and we will introduce workplace contracts to guarantee the living wage. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackie Baillie: We will tax bankers' bonuses to fund a job guarantee scheme for those out of work. We will scrap the hated bedroom tax, transform the work capability assessment, tackle the huge backlog of PIP claims and devolve housing benefit and the work programme to Scotland.

What Labour promises, Labour will deliver. What we have been promised by the SNP is vague and uncoded and is likely to amount to hundreds of millions of pounds more than we currently spend, and the SNP has no idea how it is going to be paid for.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, I have given you some extra time for all the interruptions but you really must come to a close.

Jackie Baillie: This will be my final sentence, Presiding Officer. The SNP relies on a cross-your-fingers and hope-for-the-best approach. It is inherently dishonest and the people of Scotland deserve much better than that.

I move amendment S4M-10777.4, to leave out from "UK Government's welfare policies" to end and insert:

"the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition's policies on women, children, disabled people and communities across Scotland; notes Scottish Labour's record in lifting 200,000 children out of poverty, halving pensioner poverty and leading the parliamentary debate in support of those campaigning to fully mitigate the so-called bedroom tax in Scotland; recognises that this was achieved by using the existing powers of the Parliament and that eradicating poverty requires political will rather than constitutional change; believes that the Scottish Government's plans for welfare in an independent Scotland lack detail and are uncoded; understands that the Institute for Fiscal Studies noted that there will be a £6 billion deficit in the first parliamentary session following independence, leading to a cut in public services such as schools and hospitals, and therefore believes that those who are poorest will be hardest hit and that the best way of helping people out of poverty is with the return of a Labour government in 2015."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. We have a long afternoon ahead in this debate. I remind members that, if the member speaking is

not taking their intervention, they must be respectful and resume their seats. I also remind members that comments from sedentary positions are not acceptable.

15:35

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

It comes as no surprise that the timing of this debate is just five weeks before a referendum and that it coincides with the publication of a report that allows the Scottish Government to make further claims about its position on welfare.

However, the problem that drives us today is the fact that the Government does not realise the role that welfare plays in achieving our economic recovery. The Westminster Government has made it clear that welfare has a role in economic recovery, and it is no coincidence that in this country—the UK as a whole—the proportion of workless households is the lowest ever recorded, the number and proportion of children in those households is at a record low, the number of children in households in which no one has ever worked is at its lowest level for 15 years, and the inactivity rate of 21.7 per cent has never been lower, reflecting the falling number of people who are claiming inactivity benefits. Employment is up in every UK region. Since the election, three quarters of those who are in employment are working full time. In the 16 to 24 age group, the number of those who are not in employment, education or training is at its lowest level for more than eight years.

Often when we talk about those numbers, the Government in Scotland likes to claim responsibility for them, but it cannot claim that responsibility if it pursues a negative policy in relation to our welfare reforms. The key welfare reform that was raised in the press release that came out this morning is the change in disability benefits. In that press release, the Government makes it clear that

“More than 100,000 Scots are expected to lose some, or all, of their UK disability benefits by 2018, with individuals set to lose at least £1,120 per year”.

We have to look slightly more closely at those figures. If 100,000 of the 190,000 Scots who are in receipt of disability benefit are likely to lose out, it is reasonable to expect that personal independent payments will benefit the 90,000 Scots who are most severely disabled. That is the key change that moving from DLA to PIP is designed to satisfy. It is a desire to ensure that those who are in greatest need benefit from the resource that is available.

The figure of 100,000 who will see their support reduced includes a significant proportion who, as a part of the change, will move from disability

payments to universal credit. Of course, the Scottish Government does not account for that reduction in the total budget so it, consequently, skews the figures.

The impression is being given that the amount of money that is being paid in disability benefits is somehow reducing. However, the figures that are available through the Department for Work and Pensions—I am sure that someone will be willing to dispute them—appear to tell a different story. The real-terms budget for the current financial year is a record high. The money that is being paid in DLA will begin to tail off as we reach the end of this decade and PIP begins to kick in. In fact, it is not until the later years of this decade that the amount of money that is being paid in disability allowances and benefits will begin to fall below the record high that we will see in the current year.

However, at the same time, the take-up of universal credit will plug that gap and ensure that nobody loses out. The key issue is that we ensure that, as we move forward into economic recovery, we provide opportunities for the many people who wish to work but have not had the opportunity to get back in to the workforce. Unless we can deliver a viable healthy workforce in this country, we will not benefit from the on-going recovery.

I turn finally to the discussion that took place yesterday at the Welfare Reform Committee, which has already been mentioned by Jackie Baillie. It was during that discussion that Jackie Baillie, Michael McMahon and I raised the issue of funding and the question of how the Scottish Government intends to fund the promises that it has made.

Under questioning, it became relatively clear that the promises that are being made are, by and large, empty and unfunded. It would appear that the mention of the £6 billion that the cabinet secretary likes to talk about as money that is being removed from the overall budget is not to be misinterpreted—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Alex Johnstone: It is not to be misinterpreted as a promise to reinstate that money. There appears to be no financial commitment in the first years of an independent Scotland to returning any of that resource to the people from whom the cabinet secretary claims it has been taken.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will the member give way?

Alex Johnstone: I will finish by asking a question of the cabinet secretary, which she can answer at some point later in the debate if the opportunity arises.

Will the cabinet secretary be honest with the people of Scotland and tell us, prior to 18 September, what she intends to spend additionally

within the budget for welfare in an independent Scotland? Will she tell us how it will be spent and what will be spent, or will she come clean and tell us that she intends to spend not a penny more?

I move amendment S4M-10777.2, to leave out from first “notes” to end and insert:

“supports the UK Government’s welfare reform, which seeks to simplify the welfare system, make it more accessible and make work pay; notes that welfare budgets continue to rise in response to need; supports the UK Government’s commitment to provide better standards of living for people on lower incomes by taking 242,000 Scots out of income tax altogether, and calls on the Scottish Government to provide a detailed cost and funding analysis of its own welfare proposals before the referendum in September.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. If we have to pause for disruptions this afternoon, the time will come out of members’ speeches.

15:42

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): We have already heard this afternoon that the Secretary of State for Scotland, Alistair Carmichael, thinks that we have a fantastic welfare system. I would like to hear Mr Carmichael say that to some of my many constituents who are suffering because of the horrendous welfare reforms that have come from the Tory-Liberal Government in London and have been backed to the hilt by the Labour Party.

Jackie Baillie said earlier that our answer to everything was independence, which it is not. Her answer to everything seems to be, “Stick with the Tories.” That is the Labour answer, and it is certainly not what I want for Scotland.

Let us look at some of the impacts of the welfare reforms. Since 2009, there has been a staggering increase in jobseekers allowance sanctions. A written answer I received showed that in that period there has been a 65 per cent increase in the number of disabled people who have been sanctioned; a 76 per cent increase in the number of women who have been sanctioned; and a staggering 563 per cent increase in the number of lone parents who have been sanctioned. It is absolutely clear that the current UK sanctions regime is neither ethical nor proportionate, and that it has the potential to leave already vulnerable people at risk of poverty.

We can see the increase in poverty through the rise in the use of food banks in Scotland. There has been a 400 per cent rise in their use in the past year, and a 1,103 per cent rise, according to the Trussell Trust, in the use of food banks by children. That is completely and utterly unacceptable, and that is not the kind of society that I want to live in.

It seems, however, that members of the better together campaign feel that food bank usage is absolutely fine. A report in today’s *Press and Journal* states that a post on better together Aberdeenshire’s Facebook page claimed that the rise in food bank demand was

“Scotland becoming a normal European country.”

I do not know who wrote that but, quite frankly, they are off their head.

I want to live in a normal country—a normal independent country where we do not have to rely on food banks. I do not want to live in a country where families and children, including families who are in work, have to queue to get food parcels, although better together activists may want to live in such a country.

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

Kevin Stewart: No, I will not, because the member’s side will not give way.

I turn to remarks that other groups have made about the welfare reforms. The report “Welfare Reform in Scotland: The impact on people living with HIV and viral hepatitis”, by HIV Scotland and Hepatitis Scotland, states:

“The reforms are causing significant uncertainty and anxiety, worsening the mental and physical health of people in grave need”.

As I have gone round various groups in recent times, I have seen not just uncertainty and anxiety but fear—absolute fear about what is going to happen.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society recently held an open day in Aberdeen at which MSPs were invited to discuss with sufferers their fears about the reforms that are about to hit. Those sufferers have a great worry about PIP. Ms Baillie confirmed today that Labour will keep PIP. Those folks have a great fear that they will lose their independence or that their carers will be forced to leave work in order to care for them.

The vast bulk of the folks to whom I have spoken want to remain in work for as long as possible, and often their DLA payments allow them to stay in work. DLA payments also provide additional care so that their loved ones can continue to work. This great welfare reform policy, which was supposed to ensure that folk who can work will get work, is blown completely out of the water because of those scenarios that will inevitably happen. The fear is immense. I want to live in a country where we replace fear with hope and create a system that works for all.

15:48

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Too much of my casework in the past couple of years has been about welfare and, in particular, the impact of the welfare reforms. We are all aware that times have been tough and, just when families and individuals have needed to fall back on our welfare safety net, they find it withdrawn. People with disabilities have been filled with anxiety, even at the prospect of being reassessed. Families, whether because of sanctions or a combination of reasons, have found themselves with no cash, no food and no fuel.

Even beyond the immediate benefits system, the most vulnerable have been affected by decisions that have been taken at all levels of government and which directly affect their welfare. Students with additional needs find their college courses withdrawn and people the length and breadth of our country are suffering from a lack of affordable housing. Therefore, as much as I am pleased to be discussing welfare yet again in Parliament, the motion sums up much of my frustration with the independence debate and the Scottish Government over the past three years. Labour and the SNP should be united on welfare and should work together to oppose a Tory agenda that we both resist. We should be standing up for the vulnerable and trying to lift people out of poverty rather than blaming them for their misfortune. We should be defending or even rebuilding a system that is based on dignity and respect—to use the words of the expert working group on welfare—rather than on punishment and shame.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): The member mentioned that Labour and the SNP should be united on welfare issues against the Tories. Does he accept that, as would be the case in an independent Scotland, the majority in the Parliament is united against the welfare cuts and all the other things that are coming from the Tories? Between us—the SNP and Labour—we would create a far better and fairer welfare system in an independent Scotland.

Ken Macintosh: I recognise the argument that Mr Thompson uses, but I believe that there are two answers. We in the Parliament should unite to use the Parliament's powers to make a difference and protect the people of Scotland, but the argument is also fundamentally one for getting rid of the Tory Government at Westminster and not for breaking up the whole country.

Nicola Sturgeon: I appreciate the positive tone that Ken Macintosh is striking and I agree with much of what he has said, but I am unclear about what the Labour Party says that it would do differently from the Tories on universal credit, personal independence payments and other

changes that are causing so much hardship. Perhaps Ken Macintosh could advise me about that.

Ken Macintosh: It is interesting that the SNP has modelled most of its policies on Labour policies; it has tried to copy Labour policies. There is not much difference between what the SNP presents as the position in an independent Scotland and what we would do in the UK; the question is simply about whether that is done in an independent Scotland or in the UK. I genuinely do not think that there is much difference.

We share broadly similar approaches, but the difficulty is that independence gets in the way. For the Scottish Government and its supporters, independence is portrayed as the answer to welfare, just as it is the answer to nuclear disarmament and unemployment, as Jackie Baillie said. The rest of us see that as a simplistic and misleading distraction.

On the positive side, we have to endure this for only another five weeks. I am optimistic that Scotland will emerge from a resounding no vote and unite around a shared vision for a progressive future. That is the language that has dominated the referendum debate and it is one of the few positives that we can salvage from the national discussion.

Why is independence not the answer? I will give a few examples and begin with food banks. The First Minister will face a question from my colleague Jackie Baillie tomorrow on whether there will be food banks in an independent Scotland. I will be intrigued to hear his response.

The evidence that was presented to the Welfare Reform Committee was clear about the reasons for the growth in demand for such a basic item as food. The rise in food, energy and housing costs is part of the story, but the introduction of various welfare reforms, including the increased use of sanctions, is another reason. Labour and SNP members of that committee are united in our frustration that UK ministers seem to be deliberately in denial about that link, but it is difficult to see how the SNP offer on welfare in an independent Scotland differs from what Labour proposes. According to the evidence that we heard yesterday from the Deputy First Minister, the SNP wants to end sanctions but maintain conditionality, for example.

There is an interesting contrast between the Deputy First Minister's relatively sober evidence at the Welfare Reform Committee's meeting yesterday and the entirely uncensored but stridently assertive motion in her name today. Yesterday, she painted a picture of a reformed welfare system, which she said would involve no net increased costs, but today we are back with the

language of, "We will stop the cuts," although there is no detail on how that would be paid for. It is ironic, if not amusing, that she asks for answers to questions that she will not answer herself.

Welfare is inherently complex. I will expand on why independence is not the answer. It is worth reminding ourselves that, although much of our discussion has focused on out-of-work benefits, most welfare spending goes on older people. That includes disability and housing support, but the largest single cost is the state pension. In his infamous leaked Cabinet paper, John Swinney noted the worries that exist about the affordability of pensions in an independent Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to draw to a close.

Ken Macintosh: I will do so.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has noted that the average age of the Scottish population will increase more rapidly than that of the UK, and the ONS projects that Scotland will have a higher and increasing dependency ratio in relation to those of pension age.

Most Scots recognise that we are better off working together with the rest of the UK, pooling and sharing our resources and using the Parliament's powers to make a difference, rather than using welfare simply to nurse a grievance with Westminster.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry to have to advise members that I cannot give time back if they take interventions.

15:54

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): If there is one area that I would like this Parliament to have responsibility for, it is welfare, for two main reasons. First, it makes absolute sense. We are responsible for education, preparing young people and others for the workplace. We are responsible for healthcare, when people cannot work. We are responsible for getting people into and better housing. We are responsible for trying to secure more and better jobs. The missing ingredient in the package is welfare and benefits, on which we should be able to decide.

We need a system that helps and encourages folk to work if they are able to do so, but there are many faults with the current system. We have heard a lot about that this afternoon and I am sure that we will hear more. In particular, people are not financially better off when they get into work, and they still need benefits on top of their earnings so that they can manage to live, and the current cuts are hitting women, disabled folk and younger people in particular.

My second main reason for wanting this Parliament to have responsibility for welfare is because it has shown an appetite across the parties, particularly Labour and the SNP, for dealing with welfare. We set up the Welfare Reform Committee, although we have not set up committees to consider many other reserved matters. When Labour asked for measures to deal with the bedroom tax, it was pushing at an open door, because many of us, including cabinet secretary John Swinney, detest the bedroom tax. The main challenge was how to tackle the tax while remaining within the rules.

We have had a number of briefings for the debate, including from the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland. According to CPAG, recent reforms that are having the most impact on children are: real-terms cuts; reduced entitlement to tax credits; reduced value of child benefit; and sanctions and benefit delays. The first three reforms have eroded and reduced benefits, but sanctions leave people with absolutely no income. That is what I find so awful about sanctions and benefit delays. All income can be stopped, for the slightest of reasons. How is anyone meant to cope with that?

We will not be able to vote on the amendment that Alison Johnstone lodged, which called for a "citizen's income". I realise that a citizen's income is not without challenges, but surely we could at least agree that it is a direction in which we would all like to move. Whatever their situation, everyone would be entitled to a roof over their head, food and heat.

Ken Macintosh: I put this to the Deputy First Minister yesterday. The SNP's expert working group on welfare and constitutional reform said that we should end sanctions but called for a system based on "positive conditionality". The Deputy First Minister recognised that that is sanctions by another name. Does the member recognise that description?

John Mason: A key point that the Deputy First Minister made was that we cannot change the system overnight, but that it is about the direction that we are taking. What I want to stress is that Labour and the SNP want to move in the same direction, towards a good, strong welfare system—our approach to the bedroom tax is an example. As part of that, I like the suggestion that there should be a certain level of unconditionality, whereby people are entitled to a certain income, no matter what. That is what we do for prisoners—I presume that that is what everyone should be entitled to.

I am running out of time, but I want to mention food banks. On Monday I met one of the local co-ordinators for the north and east of Glasgow. She and I are both convinced that more people need to

use food banks than are currently accessing them. A lot of people are reluctant even to go to a food bank and ask about getting help. When they do so, they find that they must have a voucher. The DWP does not give out vouchers, citizens advice bureaux do not give out vouchers, and many general practitioners do not give out vouchers. It is not easy to get food from a food bank. The Trussell Trust has a strict system for how often people can access food parcels, and—frankly—someone who has been sanctioned for 13 weeks cannot do so often enough.

The idea that food bank use is greater than the actual need strikes me as totally unbelievable. I am convinced that, in my area at least, the need is greater than the current level of use.

The Equal Opportunities Committee has been looking at a range of issues, and the Parliament received good briefings for today's debate. I cannot go into them in detail but I will mention them in passing.

On gender, the Engender briefing talks about how women are being affected by the cuts so much more than men: £5.8 billion of the changes are hitting women, whereas the figure for men is only £2.2 billion.

On disability, Inclusion Scotland has briefed the committee that the programme of welfare reform is having a devastating and disproportionate impact on disabled people in Scotland.

The Equal Opportunities Committee will take evidence on young homeless people tomorrow. Action for Children has stated:

"Some young people also face sanctions on their housing benefit when they access certain training courses."

My question for the anti-independence parties, especially Labour, is: will they support responsibility for welfare policy coming to Holyrood whatever the vote in September, and if not, why not?

The sad fact is that a no vote is very unlikely to produce more devolution. That is what I find so disappointing about Labour's position in the chamber, although it is clear that Labour members outside the Parliament, such as Bob Holman in the east end of Glasgow, are strongly supporting independence. Why is the Labour Party putting the constitution ahead of the real needs of constituents? Why is the Labour Party so focused on the constitution and refusing change? Why will the Labour Party not just choose what is best for needy people? Surely Labour accepts that it and the SNP at Holyrood would together produce better welfare solutions than would Labour and the Conservatives at Westminster?

Even if we give the Labour amendment the benefit of the doubt and assume that the party will

win the 2015 UK election, the Tories are likely to be back in 2020 and they would undo anything positive that Labour had done. Labour has a choice: does it want Labour and the SNP working together on welfare, or does it want to alternate with the Tories at Westminster?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I will have to keep members strictly to six-minute speeches.

16:01

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome this, the latest debate on welfare, which is an issue of fundamental importance to people right across the country.

I declare a personal interest as someone whose brother has been a long-term recipient of disability living allowance. I therefore assure members at the outset that I need no persuading about the anxieties felt by those who are directly affected by the changes and the associated uncertainty. It is partly for that reason that I believe that we must be absolutely clear about what we are proposing to do and, equally important, why. It is also why I think that we need to continue to listen carefully and be prepared to argue for change where evidence shows that things are not working.

I do not doubt that the process of welfare reform has been difficult and unsettling, but the UK Government can legitimately claim to have been clear about the objectives of reform and to have shown a willingness to listen and to adapt where necessary, including in relation to the needs of cancer sufferers and those living in residential care and in the application of the spare room levy. That approach will need to continue, but the UK Government does not seek to shy away from the need for radical reform—and that need for reform is something that is accepted by most independent experts and all political parties, including, it would seem, the SNP. Little wonder, given the reality that the system too often provides the wrong incentives. For too many people, it acts as a real obstacle to work. Over the period when our economy experienced almost uninterrupted growth, the welfare budget increased in real terms by around 40 per cent. That does not make sense, and it is not sustainable.

Of course, the debate is not really about welfare. As ever, as the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities admitted, it is all about the referendum and the belief that all would miraculously be better with independence. For the reasons that I set out at the start of my speech, and in the interests of those who are worried, I may be tempted to take the SNP's promises at face value, but those assertions need

to be rigorously tested, which is what Jackie Baillie, Alex Johnstone and Ken Macintosh did.

Let us start with the case for reform. The cabinet secretary denounces everyone else for supporting reform, but it is an agenda that she and her colleagues appear to accept—why else set up the expert working group? The challenge facing the group was not insignificant. Its members were presumably tasked with coming forward with proposals that would honour Ms Sturgeon's commitment to a welfare system that was "fairer and simpler", that would "make work pay", that was "innovative", that included "appropriate targeting" and that did not involve cuts, but which would not have the £2.5 billion needed to honour the promises made by SNP ministers in opposing almost every change put forward by the UK Government.

How did the group do? In truth, it did as well as could be expected. However, after months of listening to SNP ministers and back benchers rail against the work programme, sanctions and even universal credit, we find that their experts are recommending—to the surprise of no one—a work programme, sanctions and the principle of universal credit.

Simply changing the name of those UK policies to pretend that somehow what one is proposing is radically different is disingenuous and will leave many more people across Scotland wondering what the point of independence is.

As for the criticism of welfare caps and the threat of more cuts to come, the SNP's case is little more convincing. The First Minister himself has said that

"the right cap deployed in the right way ... is a reasonable thing to have".

As far as Mr Salmond is concerned, the cap appears to fit.

Meanwhile, the SNP's own fiscal commission has said that the Scottish Government will have to match the trajectory on debt reduction, and Mr Swinney agrees. It is little wonder, then, that the white paper makes no mention of any commitment to increase spending by the £2.5 billion that would be needed to make good on the promises that the SNP regularly makes to reverse the cuts, which—let us be clear—are represented in Scotland by a welfare budget that is, for the time being, going up. By all accounts, the cabinet secretary could not shed any more light on that at yesterday's meeting of the Welfare Reform Committee.

There does not even seem to be space in the white paper to explain how the SNP would pay for another of its top priorities—one that is backed by a motion of this Parliament—to increase child benefit for those who earn more than £60,000 a

year. Therefore, the SNP's claims on welfare do not stack up.

Meanwhile, we have the ridiculous claim that only a yes vote next month will save the NHS. What arrant nonsense. Since 2010, NHS funding in England has gone up by £12.7 billion. The cash equivalent for Scotland is protected and can be spent by the Scottish Government in any way it sees fit. In addition, the founding principles of treatment being free at the point of delivery and based on clinical need are unique and enduring.

By contrast, as the IFS and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland have both pointed out, the costs of independence would lead to tax hikes and/or spending cuts, which would inevitably affect the NHS in Scotland, as John Swinney agreed in his infamous briefing to Cabinet. It is no wonder that today's *British Medical Journal* poll suggests that 60 per cent of doctors believe that we get the best of both worlds as part of the UK.

On welfare, after three years of debates and much sound and fury, we know what the SNP does not like but, as Ken Macintosh rightly observed, what is not clear is how any of that would change in the event of Scotland leaving the UK or how any changes would be paid for—or, indeed, in what currency. Simply rebranding key elements of what has been introduced by the UK Government while promising to reverse other changes but failing to say how much that would cost or how it would be paid for will not wash.

We need to create a welfare system that is simple to understand, that lifts people out of poverty and that makes work pay while at the same time providing an effective safety net for those who need it. However, as I have said previously, claiming to be in favour of reform while holding the view that any cuts to any benefits or any tightening of any of the demands that are placed on recipients is automatically unfair just is not credible.

No party in the Parliament, including the SNP, has a monopoly on caring, but the SNP scaremongering about the NHS or further welfare cuts while making promises that it knows it cannot keep will not provide a more secure future for the people who need support.

16:07

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): As a member of the Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee, I am pleased to speak in this important and revealing debate on welfare, for it affords me the opportunity to ensure that no one is in any doubt about the impact of the Westminster Government's current welfare cuts and of those that are coming down the line, regardless of

whether it is Tory Labour or Labour Tory. The silence of the Labour Party today speaks volumes. It will do nothing differently from the Tories, except on the bedroom tax. Shame on Labour.

What we are seeing before our very eyes is the dismantling of the welfare system and the removal of the safety net that should be embodied in it. What kind of rotten, miserable society is being created by a Westminster system that harasses recently bereaved widows to leave their home of many decades or pay a tax simply because there is a spare room; that says to those with motor neurone disease that, to avoid the bedroom tax, they should take in a lodger; that encourages the description of people with long-term conditions who are unable to work as workshy; and which forces decent, hard-working civil servants to make judgments of Solomon about their fellow citizens in accordance with Kafkaesque criteria that are designed to lock those citizens out of the little help to which they are entitled?

As the motion states, the “damaging and destructive impact” of those Westminster policies is being felt by communities and families the length and breadth of Scotland. In the time available, I want to focus in particular on the impact on the disabled and children—two of the most vulnerable groups in our society.

As we have heard, today the Scottish Government published a comprehensive report on the financial impacts of welfare reform on disabled people in Scotland. It makes shocking reading. It is clear from the report that more than 100,000 people in Scotland will lose disability benefits. As the Deputy First Minister has pointed out, that will not only mean a loss of financial support but have a devastating impact on the quality of life of disabled people and their families.

In paragraph 2.1 of its helpful briefing for today's debate, Inclusion Scotland says:

“It is clear that the prime motivation behind the replacement of Disability Living Allowance ... by the Personal Independence Payment ... has not been empowering disabled people to the same freedom, choice, dignity and control as other citizens to participate in society and live an ordinary life. Rather it has been about cutting the welfare budget.”

There we have it in a nutshell: Westminster's treatment of disabled people in 21st century Scotland is to be determined solely by Treasury bean counters.

The Tories are so interested in the possible ramifications for disabled people that they seem to be having a little chat and telling jokes to one another. This is an important debate, and I am sure that people across Scotland will have noted the Tories' lack of interest in the interests of disabled people. We should recall that, when the Welfare Reform Act 2012 was going through the

legislative process, the Tory-Liberal Democrat Government—oh, I see that the Liberal Democrat member has gone as well—made it very clear—

Drew Smith: Will the member give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I am sorry, but no. Ms Baillie set the tone for taking interventions in the debate.

The Tory-Liberal Government made it very clear that it was seeking to achieve a 20 per cent cut across the board.

However, another way and another future—a decent, dignified future—are possible for our disabled citizens. A yes vote on 18 September will enable Scotland to halt the abolition of DLA and the cuts, and, over time, to put in place a new welfare system for Scotland that is fit for purpose and progressive, which provides a safety net through which individuals cannot fall, which will not see more than 100,000 children pushed into poverty by 2020 and which will not think it somehow acceptable that in the past year alone 22,387 children have had to rely on food banks to be able to eat.

In that respect, I want to mention again the very curious statement, highlighted by my colleague Kevin Stewart, that was made by the official better together outfit up in Aberdeenshire. Those people seem to think that in 21st century Scotland increased recourse to food banks is not only acceptable but laudable. How can they stoop so low? What a miserable lot they are. Do they have no respect for basic human dignity? Scotland is a wealthy country; it is wealthier per head than France, Japan and indeed the UK as a whole. The independent chair of the expert working group on welfare and constitutional reform, Martyn Evans, said at the Welfare Reform Committee's evidence-taking session on 24 June 2014:

“The evidence was quite wide ranging. Our expenditure on social protection overall as a percentage of gross domestic product is lower than the level of expenditure in the UK and lower than that in a significant number of other OECD countries.

The taxes that are raised in Scotland pay for our system already”.—[*Official Report, Welfare Reform Committee*, 24 June 2014; c 1565.]

There we have it.

This afternoon we have heard proof that, as far as Westminster is concerned, whether it is Labour Tory or Tory Labour, it will make no difference to our society's most vulnerable members. Labour has made it quite clear by its silence—and I see Labour members smirking away—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You should be drawing to a close.

Annabelle Ewing: They have made it quite clear by their silence that they have no intention of

doing anything very much different from the Tories.

It is time to take welfare decisions into our own hands and to control our own resources. It is time to take this one opportunity to use our vast resources to build a fairer country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Annabelle Ewing: It is time to vote yes.

16:13

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I had read the briefings for the debate before I came into the chamber, and then I got hold of the *Business Bulletin* and read Nicola Sturgeon's motion. I have to say that it is not about trying to build unity over a way forward on welfare in Scotland; it is simply an attempt to win some yes votes as we move towards the referendum. I see that Nicola Sturgeon has rejoined us. I have to tell her that her policy seems to be: "Where there is harmony, we will create discord and division and try to win votes as a result."

When I think of the welfare state, I tend to think of the Liberal, William Beveridge.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are too many private conversations. Can we hear Mr Rowley, please?

Alex Rowley: I tend to think of William Beveridge's paper to tackle want, idleness, ignorance, disease and squalor, which he called the five "giant evils". I say to Liam McArthur that I am sure that William Beveridge would turn in his grave if he saw how the reforms are impacting on people in Scotland and across the UK.

I recently visited the Benarty food bank, which is part of the Dunfermline food bank. I noted that, out of the 2,373 vouchers that had been issued from April 2010 to July 2014, the largest number had been issued because of benefit changes and benefit delays—the numbers were 613 and 710 respectively. The Trussell Trust does not count sanctions, as such. Vouchers were also issued because of refused crisis loans. Those are major factors in driving people into absolute poverty. The basic right and need that everyone in this country has to be able to feed themselves is being denied them.

The Tories and the Liberals need to come out of denial. We have food banks and major problems in our communities. We need to examine why that is the case, to stop being in denial that the problem exists, and to start to look at how we can mitigate those issues. It is unacceptable for the whole of Scotland and, indeed, the whole UK that

people have to rely on charity in order to feed themselves.

When I think about the welfare state, I also think about Clement Attlee and his Government of 1945, which brought about the creation of the welfare state. I think of the great Welshman and political hero Nye Bevan, who brought about the creation of the national health service, which is one of the greatest social creations of the 20th century and into this century. They recognised that, by pooling and sharing the resources of 60-odd million people across the United Kingdom, we could build a welfare state and a health service that would be the envy of the world.

That is why the answer to our current issues is not narrow nationalism that wants to create disharmony and to pit people against one another. It is about continuing to work to share resources across the United Kingdom so that people in any part of it will work together when people in any part of it are in difficulties.

We have to be tough on poverty and on the causes of poverty. On being tough on poverty, the Oxfam briefing that was sent out earlier highlights that

"Clydebank Independent Resource Centre supported clients to claim over £3.5 million in the 2013/14 financial year."

Those moneys were not being claimed. My criticism of the Scottish Government is that it is not working with local authorities and organisations across Scotland so that we can be tough on poverty.

I saw Nicola Sturgeon on television the other night and thought that she was announcing a new £0.5 million for food banks. The following day, I discovered that it was the same £0.5 million that had been announced previously; she just said how the money was to be spent. I think that £10,000 of that money is going to Fife. We need to work with the local authorities and at local level to ensure that we maximise how we are tough on poverty.

On policies, I say again that over the past seven years the SNP Government has a terrible record on trying to tackle inequality. I will pitch against that record the records of Labour Governments in the UK or in Scotland any time and in any place. In Scotland, 200,000 children were lifted out of poverty and pensioner poverty was halved. Those are achievements under a Labour Government. The SNP's record on tackling inequality shows that it certainly has nothing to be proud of.

The SNP has even less to be proud of in being tough on the causes of poverty. If we look at the cuts in colleges, we need to look at full employment. I have said time and again that the history of the labour movement shows that the people who were involved in, for example, the

Jarrow march and the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in did not do it for benefits but for jobs. Our objective should be full employment, giving people opportunities—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Alex Rowley: —being more ambitious for young people's lifelong benefit by getting them the training, skills and jobs so that they can have a prosperous future. Again, the SNP—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rowley—you must close, please.

Alex Rowley: —has failed drastically.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you.

16:20

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I say to Alex Rowley that I am very proud of this Scottish Government's efforts to tackle and mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax by funnelling additional moneys into the Scottish welfare fund to make up for the shortfall that was handed down by the UK Government in terms of council tax benefit. That is happening here and now, and we can be proud of it.

I thank the Scottish Government for bringing today's debate. It is important to go back to first principles. Inherent in the Labour amendment and Jackie Baillie's contribution is the idea that Scotland is somehow a basket case and cannot afford to provide a decent and fair social security system. Jackie Baillie's speech today was matched by her line of questioning at yesterday's Welfare Reform Committee meeting: no welcome for the Scottish Government's commitment to abolishing the bedroom tax; no welcome for its commitment to bringing carers allowance up to the same level as jobseekers allowance or for the Deputy First Minister's commitment to doing more for carers beyond that; and no welcome for the commitment to replacing the work capability assessment with a fairer system.

The affordability of our social security system is undeniably important, but so are ambition, vision and the determination to do better. I did not get that sense of drive from Ms Baillie's speech today. We know that

"In 2012-13, 42.3% of Scottish tax revenues were spent on welfare and pensions (social protection), compared with 43% for the UK as a whole."

and we know that

"Spending on social protection as a share of gross domestic output ... has been lower in Scotland than in the UK in each of the past five years."

So, we know that Scotland can afford a better system—which point was made by the independent expert group on welfare.

I turn to the report that the Scottish Government published today on the impact of welfare reform on disabled people. I think that the findings of the report tally largely with the report that Sheffield Hallam University prepared for the Welfare Reform Committee. The Scottish Government's report states:

"Of the 190,000 existing DLA claimants in Scotland who will be reassessed for PIP, it is expected that around 105,000 working-age disabled people will lose some or all their disability benefits by 2018, with a loss of at least £1,120 per year."

That is an absolute disgrace in 21st century Scotland.

I heard Alex Johnstone on "Good Morning Scotland" this morning on disability benefits. He said:

"The headline budget for this will actually increase, it won't reduce."

He also said:

"This is not about reducing budgets."

He needs to tell the Treasury that, because its 2013 budget document estimates a reduced spend due to disability living allowance reform of nearly £3 billion a year by 2017-18, with Scottish disabled people being expected to shoulder around £310 million of that by 2017-18.

I will return to the point that Annabelle Ewing made earlier. Inclusion Scotland says that the motivation behind the replacement of DLA with PIP has been about cutting the welfare budget. I say to Mr Johnstone that that is what people are saying, so I think that he needs to take that on board.

Food banks have been mentioned in the debate. Citizens Advice Scotland tells us that

"Between January and March 2014 citizens advice bureaux in Scotland recorded 1,311 new food parcel issues—this equates to one food parcel issue for every 50 clients who received advice."

Oxfam Scotland, which Alex Rowley mentioned, reminds us that

"In Scotland the Trussell Trust distributed 640,000 meals last year—a fivefold increase on the previous year. Large rises are also reported by other providers".

Oxfam also said:

"The evidence clearly shows that changes to the welfare system are a significant driver of rising foodbank use."

It was therefore not without some sense of incredulity that I read the comments of better together Aberdeenshire, which Kevin Stewart and

Annabelle Ewing mentioned. I will read out what it said:

“Far from being a sign of failure”,

food banks

“are an enriching example of human compassion, faith and social cohesion.”

Undoubtedly, they are a sign of human compassion in terms of the compassion of those who give up so much of their time to help others, and for many of them it is a sign of their faith as well. However, the idea that food banks are a sign of “social cohesion” rather than a “sign of failure” is something that, frankly, no one with their head screwed on could recognise to be the case. The better together Aberdeenshire group also said that to raise the issue of food banks

“insults the thousands of people who contribute, who run and who use”

them.

Let us hear what those who run food banks say. Jo Roberts of Community Food Moray told the Welfare Reform Committee that her organisation is having to provide more cold food parcels because it is seeing more

“people for whom food is the priority and electricity and heating are not”.

Denis Curran of Loaves and Fishes, in compelling evidence, told us that

“People are getting penalised for being poor, for not having, for not having the ability to do, for not having a job, and for going to the food bank.”—[*Official Report, Welfare Reform Committee*, 4 March 2014; c 1287, 1295.]

I do not understand how better together Aberdeenshire can take the position that it takes.

I conclude by referring briefly to the Labour amendment, which concludes:

“the best way of helping people out of poverty is with the return of a Labour government in 2015.”

We also heard that today, but of course that is not in our hands here in Scotland.

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

Jamie Hepburn: Scotland has voted Labour at UK general elections for the entirety of my life and for many years before, but the Tories have formed the Government of Scotland for two thirds of that period. If that is Labour’s prescription for providing a fairer social security system and tackling poverty, what happens if the Tories win next year or, as my colleague John Mason said, at some point in the future?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close.

Jamie Hepburn: That is why, although Jackie Baillie is right to say that it takes political will to make decisions, the constitution is important in this case. This Government has the political will, but it does not have the means to exercise that will. That is why we need a yes vote on 18 September.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alison Johnstone, to be followed by Siobhan McMahon. We are tight for time. You have up to six minutes, but less would be more.

16:26

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): This is one of the most important debates that we can have in the lead-up to the referendum. The creation of the post-war welfare state was a great progressive leap forward for society, and we should rightly be proud of the struggle for a system that aims to ensure that nobody is left in poverty or destitution.

Instead, we have seen the UK Government seek to stoke division between people. David Cameron’s use of the words “scrounger” and “shirker” to describe people who receive support is divisive and is an attempt to legitimise his Government’s reforms, which have not focused on the welfare and mental health of the people who are in most need, or on the urgent need to address inequality in our society.

All MSPs received a welcome flood of briefings for the debate. The one from Engender stuck out. Its shocking headline figure is:

“Since 2010, 74% of cuts to benefits, tax credits, pay and pensions have been taken from women.”

It points out that

“This rises to 81% of the ‘savings’ realised by the Treasury in 2014-15.”

It is clear that women are being hit by a gendered austerity. Engender points out that UK welfare reform has just exacerbated the gender inequality that is already pervasive in society.

The Fawcett Society has identified three main ways in which women chiefly are being hit by the cuts: through the loss of benefits and services, through the loss of public sector jobs and because, as state services are withdrawn, women will have to fill in the gap and take up further care and community responsibilities. It is hard to believe that the gender pay gap in Scotland is 13 per cent for full-time work and 34 per cent for part-time work. Women, who predominantly still manage caring duties, probably cannot find enough hours in the week or extra hours from their employer to bring their wages into line with those of their male counterparts.

Employment law is still reserved to Westminster. Why has so little progress been made? On average, women do four hours and 15 minutes of unpaid work a day, compared with men's two hours and 18 minutes. Some 40 per cent of women in employment rely on relatives for childcare—a majority of them are female—and one in four women in her 50s is caring for a disabled or frail elderly relative. The UK Government is keen to see the pension age being lifted rapidly, and if women who do not choose to continue working are required to do so, who will take on those caring roles?

The Green amendment was not selected for debate, but it referred to the Scottish Government's expert group on welfare, which identified two long-term but divergent visions for the future of social security. One is a contributions-based scheme that the expert group described as

"a highly individual approach ... tying benefits to personal contributions and savings."

That requires the complexity of means testing and constant assessment to ensure that nobody gets more than they need. The other vision is a universal one that abandons means testing and complexity and provides a citizen's basic income to everyone.

Professor Ailsa McKay, who was a member of the expert group, was a feminist economist and lifelong advocate of that universal approach. She sadly passed away before the publication of the report, and is greatly missed by her family and friends. However, I have no doubt at all that her contribution to the welfare debate will continue. The University of Glasgow is advertising for someone to fill the newly created Ailsa McKay postdoctoral research fellowship in economics to further research the relationship between a citizen's income and gender equality.

A citizen's income is the foundation of the Green vision for social security. This week, the Green yes campaign has published a new paper that demonstrates how a citizen's income could work and be paid for in Scotland. I thank John Mason for his open-minded comments regarding the citizen's income and a certain level of unconditionality. It is not a perfect proposal, but it is designed to demonstrate how Scotland can begin on its journey towards rebuilding a fair welfare system that has universality at its core. The modelling that we have done with David Comerford of the University of Stirling demonstrates how Scotland could join the ranks of the most equal countries in the world.

Under the citizen's income proposal, 70 per cent of the lowest-earning households would be better off, with the highest-earning households losing only 11 per cent of their income. The citizen's

income is a simple idea that could reduce inequality, promote solidarity and allow each of us to make our own decisions about working, caring, learning and creating without ending up on the breadline.

While we consider introducing a citizen's income, we can currently crack down on tax dodging by corporations and rich individuals, and we can call for an end to the inhuman sanctions regime that has led to hundreds of thousands of people relying on food banks or applying in desperation for hardship or crisis loans. Food banks must not become the norm; people should have the dignity of buying their food. I agree with Oxfam that the huge rise of food banks suggests that

"the principle of this ... social safety net"

is "under threat". We must do all that we can to protect it.

Alex Johnstone's amendment states that the UK Government seeks to "make work pay". If work pays, why—as the Oxfam briefing points out—are more people who are living in poverty in working households than in out-of-work households?

I agree with Jackie Baillie that the eradication of poverty requires political will; however, the current constitutional arrangement means that policies that increase poverty in Scotland can be forced upon us by those whose politics are not focused on the eradication of poverty, and those whom we in Scotland did not vote into government.

16:32

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I have spoken in nearly all the welfare debates that the Parliament has held since my election in 2011. The subject is very close to my heart and I am extremely passionate about it, but it is far from easy. We will all have a different idea of what the welfare state's purpose should be, which will be born out of political ideology in many cases but also shaped by our own experiences of the system. Did it work when we needed it to, or did it fail us in our time of need? For too many people across the UK today, the answer will be that the system has failed them. For too many people, the answer will be that it added to the burden that they were already experiencing and has done very little to alleviate the financial strain that they now find themselves trying to deal with day in, day out.

As the schools across Scotland start back this week, many parents will be thankful and relieved that they do not have to find the money to send their children to the cinema, swimming or to the local funfair in order for them to be just like their friends and have a good time during their summer holiday. However, other parents will still be

worrying about how they will pay back the debt that they are now in as a result of paying for their children's school uniforms, new school shoes, school bag and pencil case, as well as what is needed to go into the pencil case and everything else in between.

That is something that we, in this Parliament, should be doing something about; it is not for others in other Parliaments. We could and should take the opportunity today to talk about the things that we have control over and how we can change people's lives. We could talk about the one in eight people in Scotland who are carers, who need our help now. We could talk about the problems that many of our disabled constituents have with transition services, or we could talk about the lack of employment opportunities that exist, especially for females and young people. Instead, we are debating what an independent Scotland's welfare system might look like. That would be okay if the Scottish Government actually had a vision of the welfare state that it wants. However, as we know, we are presented with a list of things that the Government does not like about the current welfare state and so-called reforms and things that it would not do, such as work capability assessments and sanctions, but we get little or no information about what would replace such things.

In our briefings for today's debate, the stark figure of 60,000 people in Scotland being sanctioned between October 2012 and December 2013 stands out. It is a horrific number, and not something that can easily be explained away. It represents not only 60,000 individuals, but also their families and dependents. That is an atrocious figure, and the UK Government should be ashamed of it.

As I have previously stated, I understand that the Scottish Government would not impose sanctions on disabled people who have been found fit for work. I welcome that. However I am unclear as to what would take the policy's place. In its own words, the Scottish Government stated that sanctions would be replaced with a system that is

"more proportionate, personal and positive."

That is as clear as mud. The Scottish Government has also said that it will abolish work capability assessments. Again, we do not know what would take their place. The Scottish Government's own expert group has made it clear that assessment for incapacity benefits is necessary, but the SNP will not formulate any alternative to the work capability assessment before the referendum.

In contrast, the Labour Party asked a group of people for ideas on how to make things easier for people with disabilities. As a result of that task force, 28 recommendations were made, including

recommendations about the work capability assessments.

Labour has said that we will transform the work capability assessment to make it more effective at helping disabled people into employment. The assessment that is presently carried out does not take into consideration the disabled person's ability to work. Therefore, we have pledged to end the tick-box assessment and replace it with one that would include a detailed analysis of the jobs that each person could carry out and which could provide them with a successful career. Further to that, we would ensure that the person undergoing the assessment would receive a copy of the assessor's report on how their disability or health condition might affect their ability to work and be told what support is available to them in order that they can work in their local area. Perhaps most important, Labour has committed to making sure that disabled people are given the central role in monitoring how the tests are conducted. They will also be asked for suggestions on how the assessments can be improved.

As our shadow minister for disabled people, Kate Green MP, said:

"We want the assessment to be part of the process of ensuring disabled people who can work get the support they need to do so, not to threaten or punish them. The test should be a gateway to identifying and assembling that support. We also recognise that not everyone can work and we're committed to ensuring the support's in place for those who can't".

The opposite benches might not agree with the vision that we in the Labour Party have put forward, but one thing is clear: we have a vision and we will talk openly about it.

Of course, the hardship that many people are experiencing is not simply down to work capability assessments. Although it is true that disabled people are nine times more likely to be affected by the austerity agenda, they are not alone. As Oxfam Scotland said in its briefing for today's debate,

"the evidence clearly shows that changes to the welfare system are a significant driver of rising foodbank use."

Research that was published in June shows that more than 20 million meals were distributed by UK food banks in the past year—an increase of 54 per cent on the previous year. Those statistics are stomach-churning, but what the people who are using services like these need is a solution to their problems—problems that have been inflicted on them. They need that now, not in five weeks or five months, but now. This Parliament is letting down every person who has used a food bank by simply talking about the problem and using it as a football for a debate on the constitution. That is something that I will not be part of.

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

Siobhan McMahon: Finally, the general election next year will mark 70 years since Clement Attlee, the founder of the welfare state, became Prime Minister. I wanted to end with a poem that Attlee wrote, which struck a chord with me when thinking about today's debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you are out of time, so that is for another day, perhaps.

Siobhan McMahon: It goes:

"In Limehouse, in Limehouse, by night as well as day,
I hear the feet of children who go to work or play,
Of children born of sorrow,
The workers of tomorrow
How shall they work tomorrow
Who get no bread today?"

16:38

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

This has been, at times, a rather bad-tempered debate. I hope that I can bring some calm and sense to the close.

This is a good day to be discussing welfare reform. This morning, the latest unemployment and workforce figures showed that, again, unemployment is down in Scotland and across the UK, by a total of 6.4 per cent. The employment rate in Scotland has reached a record high. Since the UK coalition Government came to power, some 1.8 million new jobs have been created, three quarters of which are in full-time positions. Why is that important? Because, like Alex Rowley—probably a rare point of agreement between us—I believe that creating jobs for people is the best way in which to improve their living standards and reduce their dependence on welfare.

Welfare reform is working. As Alex Johnstone reminded us, the proportion of workless households is the lowest ever recorded, and the proportion of children in those households is at a record low. The number of children in households where no one has ever worked is at its lowest level for 15 years. The inactivity rate has never been lower, which is reflected in falling numbers of people claiming inactivity benefits.

The welfare system that the coalition Government inherited was broken. It had too many disincentives to people working to try to better their situations. The UK Government's approach to trying to reverse that is clearly having an impact.

Welfare reform is popular. According to an Ipsos MORI poll that was carried out last year, 50 per cent of people in Scotland believed that the welfare system was too generous as against only

25 per cent who thought that it was not generous enough. A similar poll showed that 73 per cent of people in Scotland supported a general benefits cap as against only 12 per cent who opposed it. There is actually more support in Scotland for a benefits cap than in the UK as a whole.

Liam McArthur reminded us that everyone agrees with welfare reform—or so they say. Everyone agrees that the previous system simply did not help people when they needed help and that its costs rose too quickly. However, although those in other parties claim to support welfare reform, in practice, they oppose every measure proposed by the UK Government to try to deal with it. If they believe in welfare reform, they need to tell us precisely what measures they would implement to reduce the growth in the welfare budget.

I turn to some of the points raised in the debate.

Alex Johnstone reminded us that we regularly hear from the SNP that welfare reform is taking £6 billion out of the economy. That claim would have some credibility if the SNP was proposing to reverse on independence those so-called cuts, so let us look precisely at what the SNP proposes in its white paper.

We know that by far the two biggest components in that £6 billion are the change in the uprating of benefits inflation linking from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index and the removal of child benefit from higher earners. Between them, those two changes make up the vast bulk of those savings. However, I could see nothing in the white paper about reversing those changes. The white paper says that benefits will rise with inflation, but does that refer to the CPI or the RPI? We can only assume that it is the CPI. If I am wrong, no doubt I will stand corrected in the minister's closing speech.

The only detailed proposals on welfare in the white paper are to remove the spare room subsidy, which has already been mitigated by the actions of this devolved Parliament, and stop the roll-out of universal credit and personal independence payments. The best that can be said about those changes is that the costs are marginal in the context of the total savings from welfare reform.

Therefore, the proposition that the SNP puts forward in the debate that voting for independence will make a huge difference when it comes to welfare and, in the words of the Government motion,

"only with the full powers of independence can the UK Government welfare cuts be halted"

is shown to be utterly worthless because the bulk of the reductions will not be reversed under the SNP's proposals.

What would the welfare system in an independent Scotland be? We do not know. How much would it cost? We do not know. Would taxes have to rise to pay for higher benefits? We do not know and, as Jackie Baillie reminded us, we do not even know what currency those benefits would be paid in. The SNP is using welfare policy to try to argue the case for independence but, without any detail on its alternatives, the claims that it makes are simply dishonest.

I understand that yesterday at the Welfare Reform Committee, Nicola Sturgeon said that she foresaw no net increase in welfare costs in an independent Scotland beyond proposals that have already been announced.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is what the review group said.

Murdo Fraser: I am sorry. From a sedentary position, the cabinet secretary has corrected me. She says that that is what the welfare review group recommended. I would be interested to know what the SNP recommends, because we have heard nothing in the debate about its proposals. The cabinet secretary comes to the chamber and seems to suggest otherwise. All the rhetoric is about reversing all the cuts from Westminster. That is not what she said yesterday and it is not what her review group had to say.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

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

Murdo Fraser: I would have been happy to give way, but perhaps the cabinet secretary's colleague can address those points in her closing speech.

We know from the work that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has done that Scotland would face greater fiscal challenges if it were independent than if it stayed in the UK. There is no magic money tree. There will not be more money to spend on benefits if we become independent. In fact, there will be less.

The SNP is trying cynically to play on the fears of those who are in poverty and of the disabled by promising that independence will mean that they have more money and greater security, but it cannot produce any concrete promises to back up those proposals. It is a deeply cynical and disgraceful tactic of which SNP members should be ashamed.

16:44

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I welcomed the prospect of this debate on

welfare when I learned that it had been scheduled, because it is absolutely right that the people of Scotland should hear from the Scottish Government how it plans to introduce its robust, effective, reliable and affordable welfare system in an independent Scotland. What a pity, then, that for far too much of this afternoon all that we have heard is that the SNP does not like Westminster and that it does not like the current system of welfare in the UK. We have heard virtually nothing about what change there would be should Scotland vote yes on 18 September.

Nicola Sturgeon: Will Michael McMahon take an intervention?

Michael McMahon: I would like to make some progress, if you do not mind.

Instead of real answers about how our welfare system would continue if we separated, what we have got is an aspirational wish list of vague promises of a fairer system, with no price tag attached. There is nothing wrong with being aspirational for your country and its people—we all are—but it is another thing for the SNP to criticise the current welfare system without providing answers on the detail of what it would seek to replace it with. We have repeatedly been promised such information, but it has never materialised. Unless the minister reveals the SNP's blueprint to us in her closing speech, the SNP looks as though it is going to continue to ask the people of Scotland to vote in the referendum on a prospectus that has a welfare-shaped black hole at its core.

Nicola Sturgeon: I have said before and I will say again that if we get the powers of independence we will not proceed with a £300 million cut in support for disabled people. Will Michael McMahon answer the question: will a Labour Government proceed with that cut or not? It is a simple question; can we have a straight answer?

Michael McMahon: I am quite sure that the cabinet secretary would like to boil everything down to a straight yes or no answer, but the fact of the matter is that she is premising all her questions on a vote that will take place five weeks from now. The Labour Party is looking at promoting the welfare system at the general election in 2015, and we will get the answers at that time. When we have won this referendum the SNP will get more answers than we will get from it, and that is a fact. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Michael McMahon: I welcomed the report of the expert working group, but that was never going to produce the detailed answers that we need, because it was never given the remit from the Scottish Government to do so. The expert group

identified that there are difficulties in designing entirely new schemes and that the timescales involved in ensuring that they will operate effectively will mean that any changes are unlikely to be in place by 2016. Indeed, the expert group's first report suggested that Scotland should share its system with the UK for a transitional period that would last for at least five years. That was before we had the complication of not knowing what currency we would use while we shared that system.

The Scottish Government subsequently announced that it wished to make priority changes to social security immediately following separation, but it has not yet set out how it would be able to consult on and legislate for a new system, then design, build and test it within 18 months. What we have is a recommendation for a national convention on welfare, to be formed in 2015, to discuss the detail of benefits proposals, which the SNP says we have to vote on in five weeks' time. That means that the detail will not be known until after the referendum.

More than half of Scots receive social security payments in some form, but the SNP will not tell us how much it will cost to set up a new welfare system, and independent forecasters at the IFS are projecting that we will have a worse fiscal position than that of the UK as a whole in the years ahead. This debate could have clarified for the Scottish people what they can expect from a welfare system in an independent Scotland, but the only welfare guarantee that we have from the SNP is uncertainty.

As the debate wore on, Jamie Hepburn and others referred to the better together Aberdeenshire Facebook page. I pay all deference to my colleague Lewis Macdonald, but the people of Aberdeen are very often beyond my comprehension. I do not understand why SNP members repeatedly went on about that Facebook page. It looks as though it might well be the new issue—rather than pandas, aliens and what side of the road we will drive on—when it comes to the next television debate.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael McMahon: I am certainly not going to give way to Annabelle Ewing after her disgraceful contribution.

We saw some agreement in this afternoon's debate on sanctions, the bedroom tax and food banks. Kevin Stewart, John Mason, Ken Macintosh and others found common cause. The cabinet secretary and Siobhan McMahon clearly believe in issues around disability, and that is quite right, because when Inclusion Scotland makes it absolutely clear that the current programme of

welfare reform is having a devastating and disproportionate impact on disabled people in Scotland, we must take cognisance of that.

John Mason asked something very important. He made the reasonable request that we should work together and he asked why, when we have such agreement, we could not work with them. On the other hand, Ms Sturgeon claimed that Labour does not care about Scotland's poor. That is the difference. We focus on need and not nationality; that is what divides us and what the SNP cannot understand about this debate.

The SNP's plans for post-independence welfare are paper thin. Even its own expert group on welfare has said that there would be a serious risk of disruption to benefit payments if we were to leave the UK benefits system. Again, the expert group made that report before the issue of the currency union and its inability to operate came up.

Although the SNP has made pledges, it has not made proposals for what the system would be changed to. We came along this afternoon to look for answers about what we will be voting on in September, but we are left with no conclusion other than that the only safe choice on welfare is a vote to remain part of the British welfare state that I am proud to say Labour created and that we will always be the best to defend.

16:51

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): Like others, I do not think that this has been the best-tempered debate. Something was said at the end there that I absolutely agree with: we are miles apart from the Labour Party and its better together pals in how we want to address the issue of social security, particularly in an independent Scotland.

At the start of the debate, the Deputy First Minister asked Jackie Baillie two questions about Labour's position. She asked what new powers this Parliament is guaranteed to get, if we are short of a yes vote, that would allow us to sort the incomes of disabled women and children. She also asked whether the Labour Party would halt the roll-out of personal independence payments. We did not get an answer to that question. There is no answer, and nobody on the Labour benches answered it, because their answer is no—they are tied to the same Westminster system as their pals in the Tory party.

That has been clear in this debate. Labour members have huffed and hawed and tried to get around the question using all sorts of things such as the history of the Labour Party, poems and whatever else. The reality is that they support the Tory welfare system. It was just confirmed by

Michael McMahon that Labour supports welfare being held within the UK.

Michael McMahon: Yes, we do.

Margaret Burgess: Yes, because Labour would rather have the Tories dismantling the system than have a system here in Scotland that supports and meets the need of people in Scotland.

Speaker after speaker has talked about the failed welfare state that is clearly no longer meeting the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. We all see examples of that every day. I see a UK Government bringing out measures that have little or no support in Scotland and that, as Alison Johnstone said, we are powerless to stop. The Scottish Government does not have the power.

We will always do what we can to mitigate the worst of the reforms, and Jamie Hepburn outlined a number of the issues that we have taken up. We have a strong record in taking action and have backed it up with as much funding as we can muster under the constraints of a devolved block grant. However, mitigation is simply softening the blows of Westminster. That is not enough for me—our people deserve more than that. The Scottish Government's ambition for Scotland is much higher than that. We have an ambition for Scotland.

The Government has set out a clear vision for welfare in an independent Scotland. We will halt the roll-out of the discredited universal credit. We will replace personal independence payments with a benefit that ensures that people who have a disability are treated with dignity and respect. We will abolish the bedroom tax. We will increase the carer's allowance. We will increase benefits and the minimum wage in line with inflation.

As the Deputy First Minister said in her opening remarks, Scotland is a wealthy country. Currently, however, social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP is lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, and low in comparison with the rest of the European Union. We can afford to do things differently.

The Scottish Government's vision for social security in an independent Scotland is one in which we all contribute, just as we all receive help and support from the welfare state throughout our lives. We recognise that we all have a role in supporting and sustaining the system for future generations.

Through devolution, as John Mason mentioned, Scotland has responsibility for education and skills but not for employment, tax or welfare policies. The majority of the people of Scotland want the Scottish Parliament to have control of welfare. All three of those areas are crucial to supporting people into sustained employment, and I think that

we all agree that sustained employment is the route out of poverty.

We make clear in "Scotland's Future" that, when people can work, they should work. In any case, we believe that the vast majority of people want to work, and the expert working group came to the same conclusion. Work is important for people's wellbeing just as much as for their prosperity.

We heard today about the increase in the level of in-work poverty, which shows that the equation that work is a route out of poverty is not always true. That is why we support measures such as the Scottish Government's social wage and the living wage, which will make a real difference to the people of Scotland. We are leading by example in ensuring that all the staff who are covered by the public sector pay policy are paid the Scottish living wage.

Those who, for whatever reason, cannot work should be helped to lead rich, fulfilling lives. Our call for dignity and respect to be maintained contrasts directly with the UK Government's approach, and now it contrasts clearly with the Labour Party's approach. Labour's approach, as shown by measures such as the current policy on sanctions, does little for people's self-respect and self-esteem.

Those policies do little to provide people with the support that they need, and Scottish Government research has shown that the most disadvantaged are particularly vulnerable to being sanctioned.

Michael McMahon: Does the minister recognise that the research that was conducted on the Welfare Reform Committee's behalf showed that the same problems existed right across England, Wales and Northern Ireland? Why does she want to abandon them to that fate in order to pursue her own issues in Scotland?

Margaret Burgess: That is a ridiculous argument. We recognise that the policies are not helping people throughout the UK, but we want to do something about it here in Scotland, and we have an opportunity to do so on 18 September. We should raise our standards and our ambitions.

We will not all go down together—we will lead by example and help the rest of the UK at the same time.

Nicola Sturgeon: What happened to the Labour Party?

Margaret Burgess: I have no idea where the Labour Party is coming from just now, or where it is going, with regard to what the Deputy First Minister has just said. The Labour Party is putting forward an absolute nonsense argument.

The most worrying thing is that there are more cuts still to come. We have heard today that 100,000 disabled people could lose between £1,000 and £3,000 a year as a result of the change from DLA to PIP. Again, there is no response from the Labour Party on that—it is simply tied to its Tory allies on the matter.

Jackie Baillie has been asked on several occasions whether the Labour Party will reverse the change to PIP. We have had no answer, and that is because the answer is no.

We have to remember that Labour has signed up with its Tory and Liberal pals to welfare reform. It has signed up to continued austerity, to universal credit and to the UK welfare reforms that will put 100,000 more children and 100,000 more disabled people in poverty. Jackie Baillie is shaking her head and saying that that is nonsense. She has had the opportunity today to tell the people of Scotland what Labour is going to do about welfare reform, and she has not done so.

For me, the issues around benefits and welfare reform crystallise the clear choice that we have to make in September. The choice is between a future in which some of the most important decisions about our country are made by Westminster Governments whether Tory or Labour—and, in the Tory case, Governments that are often not elected in Scotland—and a future in which the people of Scotland have the power to determine our own course and have responsibility for making the most of our extraordinary potential.

That is what independence is about. It is about making that choice for the benefit of the people of Scotland. It is about grasping the opportunity to make things better. We all agree that the welfare system is not working, and we have made proposals to make it better, with real change for the people of Scotland, but the Labour Party cannot accept that—it would rather stick with its Tory alliance.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): You need to wind up, minister.

Margaret Burgess: I will wind up.

The only way in which to get a welfare and social security system that is fair, that treats people with dignity and respect and that meets the needs of the people of Scotland is to vote yes on 18 September.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-10779, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 19 August 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Disabled Persons' Parking Badges (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 20 August 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Justice and the Law Officers;
Rural Affairs and the Environment

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Increasing Opportunities for Women

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 August 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Future

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 23 September 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 September 2014

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

Thursday 25 September 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-10780, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission (Modification of Duties and Powers) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:01

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-10777.4, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10777, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 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)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 27, Against 82, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-10777.2, in the name of

Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10777, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Against

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 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)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 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)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 92, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-10777, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on welfare, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 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

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)

Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 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 65, Against 44, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the damaging and destructive impact of the UK Government's welfare policies on women, children, disabled people and communities across Scotland; further notes that the worst of the cuts are still to come and that all three of the main UK unionist parties are determined to pursue this cuts agenda; recognises that an additional 100,000 children will be pushed into poverty, after housing costs, by 2020 as a result of these policies; also recognises that, by 2018, thousands of disability living allowance (DLA) claimants in Scotland will lose some or all their disability benefits as a result of the replacement of DLA with the personal independence payment; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has pledged to halt the roll-out of universal credit and personal independence payments, and recognises that only with the full powers of independence can the UK Government welfare cuts be halted.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-10780, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission (Modification of Duties and Powers) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

Dearest Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-10365, in the name of Bill Kidd, on a message for dearest Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the Dearest Scotland campaign, which was set up to allow the opportunity for people of all ages, from across Scotland and beyond, to write a love letter to Scotland; notes that Dearest Scotland is based in Glasgow Clyde College and run from the Cardonald campus and congratulates Cat Cochrane and her team on putting the campaign together, and acknowledges that it allows young people and old from all over the world to voice their hopes, wishes and aspirations for the future of Scotland and its people, no matter what the political or constitutional situation is and promotes the opportunity for people to share with each other their beliefs regarding Scotland's future.

17:06

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer—or, I should say, dearest Presiding Officer. The dearest Scotland campaign is innovative on the part of the team at Glasgow Clyde College's Cardonald campus and imaginative—that is not only on the team's part. The project also sparks the imagination of those who take part in it to look at our nation's future direction.

The campaign is apolitical and it focuses on the modern phenomenon of crowd sourcing to produce a vision of Scotland by the public for a common good. I had never heard of crowd sourcing before, and I wish that a wee bit more of a crowd was in the chamber, because the project is one of the best ideas that I have heard of to come out of a college. It is superb and I wish that more people would sit down, look at the website and take part in this fantastic project.

The campaign is not about age or nationality; it is about a love of this country of ours—a love of Scotland—for whatever reason that people hold that love. The reason could be the scenery, the history, the fact that someone's family and community are here or that indefinable something that binds somebody's heart to a place and time.

The way to contribute to the growing dearest Scotland family is remarkably simple—otherwise, I would not have been able to do it.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Hear, hear.

Bill Kidd: Thank you. A letter template can be downloaded from the website and a completed letter can be sent back by email or snail mail.

There are postboxes located across Scotland where people can pick up a letter pack. People can attend a letter-writing workshop—that would be for Mr Mason—or they can use the online letter submission application.

It is the writer's vision, so people should sit down, take a few minutes or an hour and share that vision with some friends whom they did not even know they had. The letter can be fact or fiction, poetic or romantic, or even harsh, critical and full of a dose of angst—as long as it starts with "Dearest Scotland".

Cat Cochrane and the young crowd at Glasgow Clyde College's Cardonald campus have come up with a cracker of an idea that will give us all the opportunity to be Rabbie Burns, Robert Louis Stevenson or Alexander McCall Smith for a wee while. We hope that we will be read by others with as much enjoyment as we have in reading those great authors.

As for me, I want to say that no matter where in the world I roam, I know that I belong to one of those places where the heart is satisfied only by coming home. New York? I love it. Paris? I loved in it, more than once. Kazakhstan? I am intrigued by it. Poland? There is more to it than meets the eye. Scotland? It is everywhere I have ever been, wrapped up in one.

I have travelled a lot, working on nuclear disarmament, and I have met a lot of people, from all over the world, who inevitably talked about their impressions of and feelings for Scotland, even when they had never been here.

Aye, we have our problems and we have known our heartaches. We are very far from perfect. However, our hopes and aspirations are blue sky. We hope for the best for this country—we all do. That is something that we should all bear in mind.

Dearest Scotland, you are the one for me and, whatever we do to you, you will still be home and you will still be the heartbeat of my life.

17:11

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am delighted to contribute to this interesting debate on the dearest Scotland campaign, which celebrates our wishes, hopes and aspirations for the future of Scotland. I congratulate my dearest colleague Bill Kidd MSP on securing time in the chamber to discuss this exciting project, and I share his view that the campaign, which is politically neutral, has the potential to produce exciting ideas about Scotland's future, whatever decision we take on 18 September.

I understand that the dearest Scotland campaign is based in Glasgow Clyde College and has already engaged a huge number of people in

a mass letter-writing campaign. I took time to read a selection of the submissions in the online archive. The letters reflect an incredibly broad range of views on the kind of Scotland that people want to see.

Although the ideas and visions for our nation differ greatly from letter to letter, a consistent aspect is the passion and enthusiasm with which people talk about Scotland. One letter in particular stood out for me. It was from Kirsten, from Shotts, who wrote:

"Dearest Scotland, Take pride in what an awesome place you are ... don't forget to let others know you are a great nation. I for one am proud to call myself Scottish. It is a wonderful and beautiful place to live with so many opportunities. But I am also so proud to be British ... You don't have to stand alone to be recognised for your greatness!"

I appreciate that the campaign is politically neutral, and I was reassured to note that people from all sides of the referendum debate are encouraged to contribute and that the online archive contains a variety of views about how Scotland can best prosper and succeed in the 21st century.

I understand that the project is not for profit and that any proceeds will contribute towards the publication of a book containing a selection of the letters that have been received, as well as a number of public exhibitions and free letter-writing workshops around the country. I will try to get to one of the workshops and I look forward to reading the book when it comes out.

The initiative will encourage people of all ages and from all walks of life to ignite their creative streaks, show off their talents and express their aspirations. That will be instrumental in kicking off the national debate on the direction of Scotland after 18 September, irrespective of the outcome of the referendum.

I encourage all members to make a thoughtful contribution to the dearest Scotland campaign and to share the project with their friends, families and constituents. Only by ensuring that a broad range of voices contributes ideas about Scotland's prospects can we build a genuinely representative vision for the future.

17:14

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I am sure that I will not be the only member in the chamber who has approached the debate with a degree of bemusement or ignorance regarding the dearest Scotland campaign. Members' business debates often throw up subjects, areas and issues of concern that many of us will not have been aware of in the past. Therefore, I regard the debate as a learning curve and, in that respect, I

join others in thanking Bill Kidd for bringing the matter to the chamber.

Having looked at the dearest Scotland website, I was intrigued to see that the campaign was started by three ladies from Glasgow who were inspired to look at our future as a nation and to invite individuals from all backgrounds and ages to contribute to their hopes for Scotland in the years ahead.

As dearest Scotland is an apolitical initiative, and as members' business debates tend to be non-partisan, I will steer clear of mentioning next month's vote. However, because the referendum will be in all our minds, I just add that, whatever the result is next month, Scots should and must unite to shape the future for the generations that come after us.

In considering Bill Kidd's motion, I have reflected on an important family event that took place just over six weeks ago. The arrival of my third grandchild, the first by my daughter Adrienne, has brought long-awaited and great happiness to us all in my family. Without wanting to be indulgent, I cannot resist mentioning Finlay George Reid as none of us at this stage has any idea what he will aspire to as he develops and grows up. Who knows, perhaps he may one day follow his granny's footsteps and come to this place, and his first mention in the *Official Report* may not be his last.

Our children and grandchildren increasingly face an uncertain future. Every day we see war and conflict around the world, with Scotland playing a key role in contributing to help with those global problems. Therefore, my hopes, wishes and aspirations for Scotland do not sit in isolation; indeed, my dreams and aspirations as a Scot may also be a vital component in the hopes and wishes of all humankind on this planet of ours—a hope that one day we might all live together as brothers and sisters in a global family that inhabits planet earth.

As human beings, we have hopes and dreams at all levels; as an Aberdonian, I have dreams for the future of my city. Tempting though it may be, I will not stray into the saga of the Union Terrace gardens and the missed opportunities offered by that project. I will just say that had Aberdeen City Council followed its citizens' views, the hopes and aspirations of many Aberdonians, including mine, would have been realised, and we would be developing a city centre worthy of the great energy capital of Europe and on a par with many great capitals around the world.

Living in both Aberdeen and Edinburgh as I do, I am always struck by the plight of those who, for whatever reason, are left homeless, and resolving that heartbreaking problem is one feature that I

would add to my love letter to Scotland. It is often said that people choose to live on the streets, but I dispute that. I aspire to a Scotland where people achieve their personal potential, where they have a permanent roof over their heads, where they are not cold and hungry and where they do not feel worthless. It is my genuine belief that we should, wherever possible, take responsibility for our own wellbeing and be self-reliant, but we should also reach out to help people who are not able to achieve that and who do not have a support network of family and friends around who could help them. Life can be very difficult and complex for many vulnerable people and they deserve our help and support.

The dearest Scotland campaign crosses the political divide, giving all Scots an opportunity to express their visions for a future Scotland. If I was a cynic, I would regard this as an airy-fairy exercise but, thankfully, I am not and, having read some of the letters posted on the campaign website, it is clear to me that there are many issues of common concern, from protecting our environment to solving the on-going scourge of drugs in our society.

I understand that the dearest Scotland campaign intends to collate responses from the public by the end of the year, with a view to exhibiting them early next year. I therefore end by asking the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs whether she will meet the campaigners, who have shown altruism at its very best, and give them the well-deserved backing of the Scottish Government.

17:19

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I thank Bill Kidd for bringing the debate to the chamber, although my gratitude does not extend to calling him "dearest".

I, too, have met Cat Cochrane, who is one of the campaign founders mentioned by Bill Kidd and a constituent of mine, to discuss this great initiative. I have also had the pleasure of contributing a letter to the website. I do not think that anyone would want to rush to the website to read my letter, but I have made my contribution.

It is clear that Scotland stands on the brink of something truly monumental. We should all consider taking the opportunity to properly document the situation that we are in the midst of, not just for clarity for ourselves but for future generations.

Most of us will post a tweet about our canvassing results, put something on our Facebook page or our website, or send something to the local press to let our constituents know about what we have been doing or our thoughts

on a particular matter, but the art of letter writing is, unfortunately, being lost and that is a real shame.

Anyone who has ever read the letters of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Abigail Adams or any of the others who were involved in the wars of independence in America will know of the pathos involved, of their hopes, fears and aspirations, and of the belief that they all displayed in their own country. I imagine that those themes will be seen in many of the letters that dearest Scotland collates over the course of the year.

One of the most famous letters to come out of pre-independent America was one that John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail on the eve of the declaration of independence. In it, he wrote:

"Time has been given for the whole people maturely to consider the great question of independence, and to ripen their judgment, dissipate their fears, and allure their hopes, by discussing it in newspapers and pamphlets, by debating it in assemblies, conventions, committees of safety and inspection, in town and county meetings, as well as in private conversations, so that the whole people, in every colony ... have now adopted it as their own act."

That sounds pretty familiar to me, and I am sure that it will sound familiar to those who have campaigned over the past two years.

I am supportive of dearest Scotland because I think that, in this year perhaps above all others, all of us, regardless of our feelings about the referendum, should take the time to put down our dreams and aspirations for Scotland. When I read some of the letters that have been submitted, I was struck by the clear and consistent messages that come through, particularly in letters by people who are not originally from Scotland but who came here to study or to make their life here and settle down.

Those letters talk about what a beautiful country we are and how friendly our people are, but they also tell us that we need to look after ourselves more, mostly through altering our relationship with drugs, alcohol or food. They make it clear that we need to believe in ourselves more, that we do not always need to be the punchline in a joke, that we can be more than we are at the moment, and that we have everything that we need to succeed and be great. It is nice that visitors, however long they are here for—whether for the Commonwealth games, to study or for a slightly longer period—see so much more in us than sometimes we are able to see.

My aspirations for my dearest Scotland are simple. I want to live in a country that is fair and that does not continue to have its enviable resources squandered on its behalf.

In the previous debate, mention was made of the unfortunate tweet about food banks that said that the existence of food banks proved that Scotland was becoming a normal European country and that

“Far from being a sign of failure they are an enriching example of human compassion, faith and social cohesion.”

I want a Scotland that does not ever think of the existence of the need for food banks as being the normal state of affairs, and which acknowledges the charitable deeds of others while doing all that it can to ensure that people—and those whom I am talking about are often in work—do not need to rely on charity to feed themselves or their families.

I demand a Scotland where everyone gets paid a fair wage for a day's work and one that is enough to ensure a decent standard of living. I want to live in a Scotland that believes in itself more, that continues to be pure dead brilliant and which keeps that gallus humour that we are renowned for the world over, but I also want us to start to look after ourselves better and to take the power to build a fairer, greener and equal society into our own hands.

I hope that, in a century, when people look back over the archives in the National Library of Scotland, which is on board with the initiative, they will see—regardless of the result of the referendum in just five weeks—that we have met the aspirations that we set for our dearest Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now invite Fiona Hyslop to respond to the debate. If you could do so in seven minutes, dearest cabinet secretary, I would be grateful.

17:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Thank you, dearest Presiding Officer.

I join other members in congratulating Bill Kidd on securing the debate. It was good to hear from Bill Kidd about the dearest Scotland initiative and to get a sense from him and other members of their visions for Scotland.

For me, one of the best features of the current constitutional debate has been the fact that it has broadened the way in which we conduct politics. This Parliament has contributed signally to that process, not least through the festival of politics that will be held here at the end of the week. This year, the festival—which is now in its 10th year—will include many fascinating sessions on aspects of the referendum debate.

We have seen new or revived approaches to politics not just in the Parliament but outside it as well, right across Scotland. I think that those on

the other side of the debate would agree that one of the great and unexpected bonuses of the current constitutional debate has been the way in which it has encouraged us to get out and debate key issues in public meetings.

I have been engaging with people in town hall meetings from Ayr to Stromness, and I have found it really energising to hear and engage with the public in different ways. Some of the methods of public engagement have been, like those local public meetings, revivals of past tried-and-tested approaches, while others have used much more modern approaches such as social media and texting.

As a fairly frequent tweeter myself, I certainly see the value in those approaches. Much can be said in a few words or 140 characters, if they are well chosen. There was something marvellously modern and yet traditional in the fact that Seamus Heaney's last words were a texted message comprising two Latin words: “Noli timere”, or “be not afraid”. I hope that people will reflect on that message over the next few weeks.

Although I am a fan of texts and tweets, sometimes there is no substitute for a letter—or indeed, in the words of the motion, a “love letter”. Letters are an irreplaceable way of expressing our thoughts and emotions, and I commend the dearest Scotland initiative for encouraging us to do just that in relation to Scotland itself.

I also commend the project's inclusive nature, welcoming letters from those of any opinion or indeed none on the constitutional question and accepting letters that are in prose or verse or which are fact or fiction. People do not need to be ministers, parliamentarians or any kind of politician to add their own vision and weave their own thread into the tartan. Although everyone in those categories is welcome to contribute, so is everyone else. The only requirement is that the letter start “Dearest Scotland”, and I am sure that we can all unite in holding Scotland very dear indeed.

Of course, that does not mean that we cannot also be critical, where that is merited. For example, a letter from Ruth in Winchburgh in my constituency combines deep love with an anxiety to see the best made universal. She has written:

“I love you so much. You are a beautiful, lush & green country that has always been good to me. I just wish that everyone else could have the same opportunities. Simple things like a decent education, a job (a proper job) a home, and the opportunity to contribute collectively are what matter most. Please let's all work together to make this happen. Let's have an approach that ensures life is 'fair' for us all.”

For that matter, the youngest contributor so far, five-year-old Rosa, has written:

"I think there should be more adventure playgrounds in Glasgow, and in schools. Children learn a lot from playing outdoors especially in the woods. I want there to be more small shops selling vegetables and fruit. There should be more farms near Glasgow. I think there should be outdoor swimming pools."

I very much agree with the motion in congratulating Cat Cochrane and her colleagues, including Sarah Drummond and Lauren Currie, on this project. I gather that congratulations are also due to Cat Cochrane on winning the prize for the best arts and entertainment story at this year's Scottish student journalism awards. It is a credit to Glasgow Clyde College.

I know that the organisers of the dearest Scotland campaign intend to send an archive of the collected letters to the Scottish Government at the end of the year, and we look forward to receiving that. The National Library of Scotland will also be archiving the material as part of its vital project to document the referendum campaign fully; indeed, it is holding a drop-in session about the project this Saturday from 11 o'clock to 2 o'clock. As a result, the letters will become part of this country's established historical record.

I will close with a poem called "Dearest Scotland" by Tessa Ransford, which appears on the dearest Scotland website and was inspired by the initiative. I think that it brings home the importance of having the chance to form our own vision, regardless of what that vision might be.

"Dearest Scotland

I used to walk down the Canongate, empty and dark,
after another day at the Poetry Library
whose very existence depended on my work
however exhausted I was, drained and hungry;
but I had a tryst to keep with Scottish poetry;
and I'd compare myself to my seafaring ancestor
who sailed to Australia in a Clyde paddle-steamer.

If he overcame the dangerous currents and oceans,
attacks by pirates and running out of fuel,
I could surely sail on with minimum funds
when I had a chart, a vision and a goal
with a volunteer crew of experts, friends and faithful
navigators; like ancient Celtic adventurers
we set afloat a curragh of poetry practitioners.

Such risk in action brings its accompaniment
and gathers its own momentum and impetus.
To wait and see or slump in bewilderment
will never achieve our destiny, our bliss.
To make our own decisions and choose our course
will see us voyage ahead on a life of adventure
and find our way to the next desirable harbour."

I think that that captures what this is all about. There should be more poetry and culture in our political debate, and I congratulate the dearest Scotland campaign on allowing not only the chamber but the whole of Scotland to share in it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes dearest Bill Kidd's members' business debate on a message for dearest Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:30.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

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