



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 18 November 2014

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 18 November 2014

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Dr Maureen Sier, the director of Interfaith Scotland.

Dr Maureen Sier (Interfaith Scotland): Next week will be celebrated across Scotland as Scottish interfaith week. It is also the 10th anniversary of Scottish interfaith week, which began in 2004. It is a week that focuses on bringing people together from different faith traditions and none to celebrate the multifaith society that is Scotland.

Interfaith engagement is more than a one-week pony. Week in, week out in Scotland, people are coming together from different religious backgrounds to build bonds of friendship, to tear down barriers of bigotry and to work together to make Scotland the sort of country that we can be proud of. In interfaith groups and faith communities, from Shetland to Skye, Dundee to Dumfries and in so many places in between, the story is one of engagement and dialogue. It is, in many ways, the untold story.

Sadly, the told story forces us to listen daily to the heart-breaking news of wars, sectarian violence, extremism, hatred and prejudice. All of this is not new: human beings have experienced many millennia of such behaviour. Whether it is politically motivated, ideologically motivated or simply motivated by power and greed, the story is all too common. The violence is perpetrated by the religious and the non-religious. The 20th century is witness to that, as are those who died at the hands of Hitler, Pol Pot, Stalin and others.

Despite the complex nature of war and violence, the story being told is that the cause of the world's problems is religion. With that story comes the consequence of spiritual disillusionment. Many are turning their backs on the centuries of religious guidance that comes from humanity's great spiritual and religious traditions: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism and others.

I am here today to say that there is a different story to tell: a story of equality, friendship, sacrifice, engagement, joy and spiritual enrichment. It is the story of Scotland's great history of interfaith engagement and support. It is

the story of ordinary people from every background sharing together the spiritual wisdom of their faith traditions and using that wisdom to do good in our country.

In cities, towns, villages and islands across Scotland next week, thousands will be engaged in respectful interfaith dialogue and friendship building. I urge you all to find out what is happening in your area and to take part in the celebration of Scottish interfaith week 2014. Thank you.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Hospitals (Capacity)

1. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that over 3,000 patients were boarded in the wrong hospital department for their condition because of capacity shortages. (S4T-00837)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): We are aware of the challenge that boarding poses to all healthcare systems. As far as I am aware, Scotland is the first country to take national action on boarding. The studies that we have carried out show that boarding is not good for patient outcomes. The *Herald* report on 2,000 patients boarding in July and August should be viewed in the context of more than 1 million in-patient episodes each year in Scotland.

Through our £50 million three-year unscheduled care action plan, national health service boards have committed to work to minimise all boarding of patients. Approximately £8.2 million of investment from the action plan has been used this year to support additional capacity and innovative approaches to improve the way in which patients move through and out of hospital.

We have also introduced mandatory nurse and midwifery workload planning tools and we are working closely with NHS boards to develop a bed planning toolkit. That new toolkit, which I believe will be a first in the United Kingdom, will support NHS boards and their partners in Scotland to review capacity on an on-going basis.

Jim Hume: I thank the minister for that answer, but the system is in crisis. Some 3,309 patients were in the wrong ward because of capacity shortages, 1,706 were in hospital in July when they should have been discharged and 124 of those waited for more than six weeks to go home. The picture will, of course, get bleaker as the winter goes on. We have had some news today, but it will be too late to improve the situation immediately for the winter months. What measures has the Scottish Government taken to ensure that the health boards are prepared and able to deal with the extra pressures that this winter will bring?

Alex Neil: It always helps if the member listens to the first answer. I have outlined the action that we are taking to deal particularly with the winter surge.

Let me put in perspective the fact that 3,000 people were boarded over the summer. That

means that 96 per cent of patients were not boarded. Now, 4 per cent were boarded, and the ideal would be that we did not need to board any patient, but there has been boarding of patients since 1948. We have an action plan on unscheduled care and we are working through the recommendations agreed with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh from its report. It is not us who are in crisis. It is the Liberal Democrats.

Jim Hume: It is a pity that the cabinet secretary resorts to cheap shots like that. He should maybe listen to the director of the Royal College of Nursing Scotland, Theresa Fyffe, who said:

"It's time for the Scottish Government to stop hiding behind sound bites."

Nurses enter the profession because they want to deliver good-quality care, but 55 per cent report that they are unable to deliver care to the standard that they want to reach because of the strain. Boarding means that patients are on wards that are inappropriate for their needs, which puts additional pressure on staff.

What is the Government doing to look properly at the workforce to ensure that we have the right number of beds as well as the right number of people with the right skills to ensure service of the highest quality?

Alex Neil: On bed capacity, we are developing a bed planning toolkit. Our health service is the first in the world to develop such a toolkit, and that is on top of the workforce planning toolkit and the plans that I mentioned, which are being activated right now, on unscheduled care and dealing with the specific issue of boarding.

I point out to the member that levels of satisfaction generally in the national health service have risen significantly in the past few years. The reason for that is that patients recognise that we face significant challenges in the provision of healthcare, particularly against a background where we do not have control over our budgets and we are denied the resources from London, but that we are facing up to those challenges and we have plans in place, which are being implemented as we speak, to improve the service even further.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): What investments have the Scottish Government and the NHS made in the past two years to improve the way in which patients move through the hospital system and to help to free up beds, reduce the amount of time that patients spend in hospital unnecessarily and thereby increase the acute capacity in our hospitals?

Alex Neil: There is a whole list of initiatives. Let me give just one example. One reason why there is sometimes a problem with patient flow, particularly for the third of patients who present to

accident and emergency who have to be admitted, is that in some hospitals, because of the daily discharge profile, only 10 per cent of daily discharges of patients are done before lunch time. That is not because patients are not ready for medical discharge. They are ready, but the co-ordination of pharmacy, transport and other services often means that the daily profile is such that most people are discharged in the afternoon or evening.

One of the ways in which we are improving patient flows in hospitals is to improve the daily discharge profile. We should look at hospitals such as Crosshouse hospital, for example. In many parts of Crosshouse hospital—I pick that hospital as just one example—the daily discharge by lunch time has increased from 10 per cent to 40 per cent. That means that beds are freed up for the afternoon and evening admissions. If every hospital in Scotland got to that kind of profile, many of our problems with people waiting for beds after being dealt with in accident and emergency and other issues would take care of themselves.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife (Lab)): I find the cabinet secretary's replies breathtaking in their complacency. Three years ago, when Nicola Sturgeon was Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, we pressurised her on boarding and, as the cabinet secretary said, a monitoring system was introduced. Three years on, that is not being used to any purpose, as our freedom of information request showed. We made that request also to assess whether there was any joined-up thinking on boarding. As the cabinet secretary has admitted, it is bad for every patient, but it is particularly bad for those with assessed cognitive problems. Those two things are not joined up at all, as has been admitted.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Can we get a question, Mr Simpson?

Dr Simpson: When will the cabinet secretary accept that there are serious problems with occupied bed days and boarding out, which is affecting not numbers but 3,000 individual people?

Alex Neil: Unlike the previous Administration, we, under my predecessor and me, have taken action to tackle the challenge of boarding. That is why, with the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, we had a piece of work done for the first time in a long time on the specific problem of boarding.

As with many of the other challenges that the national health service faces, the issue relates to better planning and improved patient flow. That is why we took action by introducing a workforce planning toolkit and a bed capacity planning toolkit. Those things do not appear overnight. It is the first time that that has been done in any

healthcare system, and they take time to get their results, but that is happening.

Let us get the matter in perspective. As I said earlier, the ideal would be that nobody would need to board, but the numbers represent just under 4 per cent of all patients who were in hospital in Scotland during the time period of the FOI request. Some 96 per cent of patients were not boarded. That is not a system in crisis; it is a system with a 4 per cent challenge that we are working through.

It is not right for Opposition politicians to describe the health service as being in some kind of crisis every time they stand up. In fact, our health service has been rated as the best in the world and the safest in the world.

Bird Flu

2. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its state of readiness is for dealing with bird flu, in light of the recent outbreak in Yorkshire, and what priority it now gives this disease. (S4T-00839)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government has published detailed contingency plans for dealing with notifiable animal diseases, including avian influenza, and exercises those plans regularly with operational partners and other Administrations across these islands. Although no cases of bird flu have been reported in Scotland, we have alerted our stakeholders to the outbreak and encouraged them to remain vigilant and seek to maintain high levels of biosecurity. We are in constant contact with the relevant agencies across the United Kingdom and are ready to respond to any outbreak should it occur in Scotland.

Alex Johnstone: Is the minister in a position to give a clear indication that the strain that has been reported in Yorkshire is not likely to give any concern about human health and that, as the specialist poultry industry in Scotland approaches its most important annual market, we can guarantee the quality of the Scottish product and ensure that it sells into a buoyant market?

Richard Lochhead: I can indeed give comfort to consumers and the member that the H5N1 strain, which is the strain that is known to cause risk to human health, has been ruled out in the three cases that are known about across the continent and down south. Therefore, the chief medical officer in England has said that there is a very low risk to public health, and the Food Standards Agency has said that there is no risk to food safety.

We continue to monitor the situation closely, of course, but I certainly agree that, as things stand, we can have full confidence in the Scottish

product. Restrictions have, of course, been put in place on exports from this country. I hope that they will be only temporary while we wait to find out about the full scale of the outbreak.

Alex Johnstone: Were we to see a recurrence today of the previous outbreak from a number of years ago, would resources be available to cope in the event that a strain became present that was a danger to human health?

Richard Lochhead: I am confident that we have the arrangements in place. However, we must be very careful. At the moment, the strain that is known to cause a risk to human health has been ruled out. Therefore, we are speaking about a different strain. It is important to convey that message to the country and the poultry industry in particular.

We have contingency plans in place. We have a set of arrangements that will be urgently put in place, should the situation change at any point. However, this particular outbreak does not give rise to concerns of any threat to human health or food safety.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): It has been suggested by some experts that the outbreak in Yorkshire originated among migratory birds. Does the cabinet secretary agree? If so, should the public at large be looking for signs among the wild bird population that has migrated here for the winter?

Richard Lochhead: As I said, we are asking everyone to be vigilant, particularly the industry, which should report any dead birds immediately. However, the fact that the three recent outbreaks in Germany, in the Netherlands, and here on these islands have occurred in the proximity of damp areas with wild birds and the absence of any other possible link between the outbreaks points towards wild migratory birds as a possible source of the virus. However, the investigations are ongoing. As soon as the facts are available, we will put them in the public domain.

First Minister's Statement

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We move on to the next item of business, which is a statement by Alex Salmond, the First Minister of Scotland.

14:16

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): First, I must—not for the first time—disappoint Willie Rennie. I took it from his question at First Minister's question time last Thursday that he was making a very subtle, last-ditch attempt to persuade me to stay in post. I have given his suggestion great thought, but have decided to resign anyway at the start of the parliamentary business tomorrow.

This notice should allow Mr Rennie ample time to secure his nominations to have a tilt at the job. I assure him that, if he so decides, I will weigh up his candidacy with great care—before casting my vote for my friend and colleague Nicola Sturgeon.

Presiding Officer, there are only a minority of members here who—like you and I—attended the opening ceremony of this reconvened Parliament in 1999. It was a great day. We heard moving poetry; the late Donald Dewar gave the finest speech of his life; and when Sheena Wellington sang “A man's a man for a' that”, the entire chamber joined in for the final verse.

One other thing struck me about that day: when the MSPs entered the general assembly building on the Mound, we were cheered in by the public. I had never seen that level of public engagement in politics before and, until this past summer, I had never seen it since.

The public enthusiasm on that first day was an inspiration, but also a challenge. Eddie Morgan captured the mood perfectly five years later, in his poem to mark the opening of this Parliament building:

“We give you our consent to govern, don't pocket it and ride away.

We give you our deepest dearest wish to govern well, don't say we have no mandate to be so bold.”

My view is that, on the whole, this Parliament has fulfilled the public's wishes and earned their consent; we have accepted the mandate to be bold. Our composition reflects much of the diversity of modern Scotland. We have become the chief hub of national discourse and debate; the fulcrum of Scottish public life; the chamber that people expect to reflect their priorities, values and hopes.

That is not because of any one party—it is because of the commitment of so many of the

members over the past 15 years. I think in particular of some of the MSPs who are no longer with us—Donald Dewar, Margaret Ewing, Bashir Ahmad, Phil Gallie, Donald Gorrie, David McLetchie, Brian Adam, Helen Eadie, John Farquhar Munro, Sam Galbraith and the truly remarkable Margo MacDonald.

This Parliament's procedures are not perfect. How on earth could they be? We are not 15 years old, but 15 years young. You, Presiding Officer, have implemented significant improvements. However, this Parliament has great strengths and we should never underplay them.

The last speech that I made in this chamber was at the business in the Parliament conference, when 100 business representatives were sitting here alongside six ministers, 17 MSPs and people from the third sector and the wider public sector. Last year, more than 400 different organisations held events in this building. Overall, in 15 years we have welcomed more than 4 million visitors.

That degree of accessibility is not unique in the democratic world, but it is very rare and pretty impressive. Throughout my time as First Minister I have tried to reflect that in the approach of the Government to our key social partners. Last week the Scottish Trades Union Congress made exactly that point at our regular meetings between Government and general council.

I have led a minority Administration and a majority one. Minority government requires negotiation, to recognise honest disagreement and then compromise in the public interest. I have absolutely no idea whether my experience of minority government in this place will ever come in handy in another place.

Interestingly, when we had a minority Government, the Scottish National Party was on the side of the majority for 80 per cent of the votes in this chamber. There were hardly any occasions when all the other parties lined up against us—mind you, there was that small matter of the Edinburgh trams.

Perhaps the better, more important point to reflect on today is that on many occasions, in both minority government and majority government, there has been cross-party support for social and economic change.

For example, I think of February 2008, when the Liberal Democrats and the Greens voted with us to restore the principle of free higher education in Scotland. I think about June 2009, when we passed the most ambitious climate change legislation of any country in the world and we had the support of every party in the Parliament, including the Conservative Party. I think about March this year, when Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens joined with us to

ensure that nobody need face eviction from their home as a consequence of the bedroom tax.

Most of all, I think about the consistent and often joint endeavour, against the headwinds of economic circumstance and austerity, to make Scotland a stronger, fairer and more cohesive nation.

Throughout my time as First Minister I have heard it said by some in this place that the Government's pursuit of national independence crowded out other issues, and even that the constitution was of little interest in Scotland. That has not been the experience or the verdict of the people. We have all just lived through one of the most invigorating, extraordinary debates of the democratic era—one of the most impressive of any country anywhere, at any time.

It is argued that people everywhere have become disengaged from politics; not in Scotland in 2014. It is said that they no longer care about the business of governance; not in Scotland in 2014. In the past few months we have watched an electorate passionately engaged in the business of fashioning their future. I see little evidence that the people of Scotland resented the Government for pursuing that business with them and for them.

It was considerate of the *Daily Record* newspaper—a consistent bulwark for this Government over the past seven years—to provide a poll showing 50 per cent SNP support on the very day that I am leaving. Mind you, it might be because I am leaving—

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Hear, hear. [*Laughter.*]

The First Minister: It is a wise newspaper that listens to the verdict of its readers.

The more important realisation is this: we are on a political journey, and each step along the way has been dictated by the impact of the constitution on the issues that mean most to ordinary Scots.

This Parliament was reborn out of the realisation that we could no longer afford to have our domestic politics dictated by Governments without democratic legitimacy. We progressed because people became impatient with politicians who wanted to administer rather than govern, and we will grow further yet, because people wish to shape the circumstances around them and are demanding a Parliament that is fully equipped for that task.

The last 12 months have been an extraordinary example of this nation's talents and capabilities. It has been a year of substantial economic progress: 50,000 more people are in employment in Scotland; we have a record total of women in employment in Scotland; and the figures show inward investment at a 17-year high. We have

hosted our year of homecoming, staged the Ryder cup, and organised the greatest ever Commonwealth games. We have also managed a referendum that has been hailed around the world as a model of truly participative democracy.

Scotland has a new sense of political confidence and a new sense of economic confidence. They are reinforcing each other and—wherever we are travelling together as a nation—they are transforming this country for the better.

That new sense of political confidence—of engagement—is the point on which I wish to end. At the start of my speech, I mentioned the enthusiasm that was generated by the re-establishment of this Parliament in 1999, when the MSPs were applauded into the assembly hall on the Mound. Fifteen years on, that applause has evolved into something much more meaningful—sustained, critical, constructive engagement involving people in every part of the country.

Scotland now has the most energised, empowered and informed electorate of any country in Europe. We have a new generation of citizens who understand that their opinion matters, who believe that their voice will be heard and who know that their vote can shape the society they live in.

For all of us, that should be a point of pride and a source of challenge. For me, the sense of generational change has been a factor in deciding that the time is right to move on from being First Minister. For this Parliament, it should spur us on to become even more accessible and to serve the new expectations of the people. For everyone in public life, it should inspire us to involve, include and empower the electorate as we continue the quest to create a more prosperous and more equal Scotland. I wish each and every one of you well in pursuit of that endeavour.

It has been the privilege of my life to serve as First Minister for these last seven and a half years. Any parting is tinged with some sorrow, but in this case it is vastly outweighed by a sense of optimism and confidence—confidence that we will have an outstanding new First Minister; confidence in the standing and capability of this chamber; and, most of all, confidence in the wisdom, talent and potential of the people of Scotland.

Scotland has changed—changed utterly, and much for the better—over the 15 years of this Parliament and over the seven years of this Government, but I am happy to say, with every degree of certainty, that more change and better days lie ahead for this Parliament and for Scotland. *[Applause.]*

First Minister's Statement (Response)

14:28

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate the First Minister on his statement to the chamber and associate myself with much of what he said. I thank him in particular for recognising those MSPs who are no longer with us.

We are a young Parliament and Alex Salmond has been the First Minister for almost half our lifetime. He and I have sparred, disagreed, fallen out and fought across the floor of the chamber, and I have particularly enjoyed our personal jousts at First Minister's question time. I thank him for all the name checks that he has thrown my way—they have seriously done wonders for my profile. However, it would be wrong of anyone, not least me, not to recognise the First Minister's commitment to Parliament and to public service. No one of any party is able to deny his passion for Scotland or his love of his country.

We know, though, that the First Minister also brought to bear—mainly on the Opposition, but not always—his very significant political talents. The Scottish Parliament and Scottish politics in general need people of talent of whatever political persuasion, because that is how we improve our political debates and our institutions, and the First Minister's considerable abilities will be missed. Given his track record, we know that he might just emulate Arnold Schwarzenegger and proclaim that he will be back.

I know how much of a toll being an elected member takes on family life, so I hope that the First Minister gets to spend at least some time with his wife Moira, and I wish them both well for the future. I could also have suggested—not that I would—that he will now have more free time to play golf, but that is one thing that appears not to have been affected by the burdens of office.

I know how proud the First Minister's father is of his son's achievements. Robert Salmond has been to the Parliament on a number of occasions to see his son in action, and I am sure that there could have been no prouder moment for Mr Salmond than to see his son elected as First Minister of Scotland.

The First Minister has had a long and distinguished career, but it was not all plain sailing. Who knew that he was expelled from the Scottish National Party? If anyone is so minded, they can catch on YouTube the First Minister marching out of the SNP conference in Perth with, among others, Kenny MacAskill, Stewart Stevenson,

Roseanna Cunningham and, of course, the late Margo MacDonald. However, I issue a word of warning: that is 10 minutes of their life that they will never get back.

It did not take the First Minister long before he was back in the fold, taking over the leadership of his party for the first time. It will forever be a matter of record for historians to write about that in a relatively short period of time he took his party from relative political wilderness to minority government in 2007. The fact that he then went on to achieve majority government still has John Curtice scratching his head.

The First Minister can be assured and rightly proud of his record as leader of his party, but there is no doubt that the single biggest issue to have dominated his term in office and the lifetime of the Parliament was the referendum campaign. Whatever side of the debate they were on, no one can deny that it was invigorating. No politician should ever be afraid of welcoming political engagement, whatever quarter it may come from, but—let us be honest—all of us would love to see turnouts of the level that was experienced on 18 September. More than anything else, before we are SNP members or Labour members, we are democrats. To see so many Scots participate was a genuinely heartening experience.

That the First Minister has done the honourable thing and taken responsibility for the defeat in the referendum is to his credit. That seems only fair because, after all, as he apparently said on BBC Radio Scotland this morning, it could never have happened without him. The First Minister knows that I always like to be helpful, and I think that I know where the yes campaign went wrong. After the First Minister's comment that, single-handedly, he would have prevented the crash of RBS, thereby saving the entire world from an international banking crisis, surely the answer is clear to the SNP and to everybody in the chamber: if only the First Minister had been running the yes campaign.

I can understand Mr Salmond's disappointment. He should take heart, because it appears that he has started a bit of a trend with the 45ers. I am referring not to those who are in denial about the referendum result but to the supporters of Keith Brown, who are telling all who will listen that he actually won and that the membership figures for Clackmannanshire and Dunblane SNP are now on a par with the population of China.

I understand that the First Minister is writing a book. I will rush out to secure a copy. Apparently, he is promising some surprising revelations. Will he reveal that he has eventually found the missing European Union legal advice? What about a crumpled-up receipt for some swanky American hotel? Who knows? He might even get some

writing tips from his biographer, David Torrance. He knows him—the guy off the telly. Although he is not quite sure who David Torrance is, I understand that the First Minister writes about him regularly.

Last week, I asked the First Minister to describe himself in one word. None of us was surprised when he suggested that that was a wholly inadequate task for a man of his considerable talents. I agree: they are such considerable talents that, even as we speak, monuments are being erected to pay tribute to his time as First Minister. I know that that sounds interesting to many: a standing stone is being erected in Edinburgh to celebrate Alex Salmond. I never knew that we had such a celebrity in our midst. Perhaps of more interest—who knows?—is who the kind benefactor is.

Whatever happens, I am sure that we have not heard the last from Alex Salmond, and neither have radio listeners. The big question on everyone's lips is, "When will we hear from Alex from Strichen again?" If the rumours are true, his colleagues in Westminster will be hearing a lot from him in due course.

The First Minister has never been lacking in ambition for Scotland but he now moves on to pastures new. I genuinely wish him well in his future career. Quite what the new deputy leader of the SNP, Stewart Hosie, will make of the First Minister's return to Westminster is unknown—as is, indeed, what the leader of the SNP in Westminster, Angus Robertson, will make of it. However, they need not worry, because Alex Salmond will leave them well behind: his ambition is, of course, to be the Deputy Prime Minister.

As the First Minister steps back from the front bench to the back benches to contemplate, his future place in history—the history of both the Scottish Parliament and Scotland—is assured. He has, without doubt, been a towering figure in Scottish politics for a decade and more and has been Scotland's longest-serving First Minister. I thank him for his service to this Parliament and to the country.

I close by repeating a line from our national anthem that could be about our departing First Minister. No, it is not that we sent him home "to think again"; it is, perhaps more aptly,

"When will we see your like again?"

14:37

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): I add to those of my party my best wishes to the First Minister as he leaves office today. It is traditional at this point to add a few words about how enjoyable retirement is and how pleasant the golf

course looks, but seeing that there seems to be absolutely no chance that Alex Salmond is going to retire, I will leave that to one side, for the moment.

It is said that all political careers end in failure—that is, except for Alex Salmond's. He is the archetypal Teflon don whose career does not appear ever to actually finish. Claims about leading the SNP to 20 seats in 2010—actually, they saw a drop from seven MPs to six—and boasts about taking Glasgow City Council in 2012 and claiming 3 MEPs in the summer of 2014 all died at the ballot box, but still the juggernaut rumbled on.

He is a political Lazarus, railing against a Westminster elite that he has been part of not once, but twice, and to which he could after May return for a third time. No doubt Nicola Sturgeon does not want a back-seat driver directing traffic from the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee here in Holyrood.

However, regardless of whether this is an end or merely a brief pit stop before Mr Salmond's next lap of the political track, let me today pay tribute to, and pass comment on, the First Minister's period in office. Let me start by touching on where I began, because if there is one thing that we can all recognise that distinguishes Mr Salmond from many of his contemporaries, it is that quite remarkable longevity. When I was elected Conservative Party leader, he kindly called me to offer his congratulations and quickly said "Excuse me for asking, but how old are you?" When I answered, he quite wistfully replied, "Ah. I was 35 when I first led my party." What a contribution he has made to that party. To many people for many years he simply was the SNP.

The pressures of leadership are immense. To have served for two decades at the helm and for more than seven years as First Minister is a feat of enormous stamina, willpower and discipline. There are, I believe, very few people who would be capable of it. What has also distinguished him has been the way that he has stuck to his course for all that time. To read Mr Salmond's maiden speech to the House of Commons in 1987 is to look back to a different era, but there he is, as if it were yesterday—moaning about the Scottish Tories, aiming a low blow at the Labour Party for failing to take us on and banging on about the constitution. If he sometimes appears like a stuck record the truth is that it is because Alex Salmond has stuck to the same tune over such a long period of time that, like an ear worm, the lyrics have been retained in people's brains.

We on this side of the chamber might not have agreed with him very often, but it is unusual to find a politician who, for nigh on three decades, has relentlessly made the same case over and over

again. We would be churlish not to recognise the belief, persistence and stamina that that takes.

However, it is as First Minister today that he is resigning and it is his record as First Minister of Scotland that will, ultimately, decide his legacy. The record is mixed and, for simplicity's sake, it can be neatly divided into a game of two halves.

In his first term from 2007 to 2011, Mr Salmond's Government's minority status ensured that he had to gain consensus and reach out to other parties for support. The fact that sceptical Scottish voters were worried about a nationalist administration meant that Mr Salmond had sometimes to tone things down. Sometimes he appeared to have declawed himself; maybe he counted to twenty every time he was about to say something about independence and focused on mouthing lots of positive, but vague, statements on progress.

Ever the populist, he saw better than any of his predecessors how public funds could be used to win support among key target voters, hence the early decisions to cancel bridge tolls and scrap university tuition fees and prescription charges. We even worked with him on a number of other policies, including the provision of 1,000 extra police officers, a fund to regenerate our town centres and a new drugs strategy for Scotland. There could be no doubt across Scotland that we now had a Government that looked and sounded as if it knew what it was doing, even if we did not much like what that was. The result was that despite not having a parliamentary majority, no party sought to try and bring down the SNP Government during those first four years.

On Thursday, the First Minister joked to my Labour and Liberal colleagues that working with the Conservatives was electoral suicide, despite the small matter of our having defeated him in the recent referendum and despite, also, his knowing that one of the reasons why his Administration gained reputation for competence and stability during those first four years was that he needed, sought and received support from the Scottish Conservatives in order to pass his budgets and keep his Government on the rails. One might say that the First Minister and Annabel Goldie stood shoulder to shoulder to make the Government work. I would not go so far as to say they were better together, but such a close working relationship was no drag on his electoral prospects in 2011.

If that was the first half, we are all too aware of the second. With a remarkable majority, the referendum on independence was agreed, and it is a tribute to both Scottish and UK Governments that it was done with such good faith on both sides. However, some will not judge Mr Salmond's record from then on quite so kindly. I do not

be grudge his devoting the Scottish Government's time and energy to campaigning for independence; that was his right and his democratic mandate. Rather, in time, I believe that questions might be asked about the way in which Alex Salmond fought that campaign.

Another case could have been made that accepted and acknowledged the upheaval that separating our United Kingdom would have caused. He could have acknowledged that some things would be worse, at least in the short term. Alex Salmond could have used his powerful political and communication skills to have argued, that all that notwithstanding, the goal of a fully sovereign Scotland was worth it.

I am not saying that our own campaign was perfect; indeed, it was not. I am saying that it was the First Minister who had ultimate responsibility for setting out to people the facts about independence; on that crucial task, I am afraid that he came up short.

His decision immediately after the referendum to resign was an honourable one. Many of us here have, however, greatly enjoyed the "Salmond unleashed" that we have seen since: the green ink letters, the radio show phone-ins and the opening of supermarkets out of pique.

We should, however, remember that Mr Salmond said, on the day that he took over as First Minister in May 2007, that

"The Parliament will be one in which the Scottish Government relies on the merits of its legislation, not the might of a parliamentary majority. The Parliament will be about compromise and concession, intelligent debate and mature discussion."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 2007; c 24.]

Inevitably, given the passions that were raised by the independence referendum, it has not been easy to maintain those noble ambitions. However, Mr Salmond has led a Government that has often tried to do so, and for that he deserves great credit. I agree with Mr Salmond that this Parliament has become the centre of gravity in Scottish politics. For that, he and his team deserve our regard.

This Parliament's stature is now recognised by all, and we are all committed here to ensuring that far greater powers and responsibilities are passed to this place. Alex Salmond can leave today in the knowledge that he has taken his party from the fringes to a position of enormous strength.

His leadership has been characterised by a remarkable instinct for the exercise of power, which kept him at the top of his party for two decades, brought him to the top of Scottish political life and made him a dominant politician of this era.

I now find myself in a remarkable position, Presiding Officer. I stand before you today as one of the rarest of breeds: an Opposition leader in the Scottish Parliament who appears to have outlasted Alex Salmond. That is, of course, unless he decides to come back. On the assumption that he will not, I once again extend my best very wishes to him, to Moira and to his wider family.

14:45

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

Last week the First Minister said that he had quoted the wrong general when back in 2004 he rejected appeals to return as leader of his party. Apparently he meant to quote General MacArthur saying "I shall return." MacArthur made that remark on his arrival in Australia, following a harrowing escape from Corregidor, to organise the offensive against Japan in 1942.

The paths of the First Minister and me have crossed occasionally. I do not know whether he remembers that we first met in the Bridge cafe in Kincardine on polling day for the Dunfermline by-election, which he confidently predicted he would win. Less than a week later, I am sure that I heard him cheering when I took my seat to be sworn in. That is a stark reminder to the First Minister that winning is not the sole preserve of his party and that, just like General MacArthur, we shall return, too. [*Laughter.*]

The statement that the First Minister actually made in 2004 was:

"If drafted, I will not run; if nominated, I will not accept; if elected, I will not serve."

That comes from the Sherman pledge, which is a remark that was made by the American civil war's General Sherman when he was being considered as a possible Republican candidate for the presidential election of 1884. A variation was crafted a century later. When Democratic Congressman Mo Udall of Arizona was asked whether he would run in 1984 against President Ronald Reagan, he responded:

"If nominated, I shall run to Mexico. If elected, I shall fight extradition."

I can guarantee that if the First Minister wants to follow suit, we will not seek his extradition. He most certainly would not be part of any new fresh talent initiative.

Alex Salmond sat behind me on the green benches for four years, offering words of encouragement. I have been returning the favour from this seat. I can now let him into a secret: I listened to him in Westminster as much as he appears to have listened to me here. To be fair, although the First Minister repeatedly dismissed my proposals for investing in nursery education for

two-year-olds he did accept, finally, that I was right after all.

The First Minister has attracted many names during his tenure, some of which are not suitable for this chamber. I am sure that he will reject this comparison, which I make to pull his tail, but he a bit is like Margaret Thatcher: a Marmite figure, with his supporters being as passionate as his detractors.

His lasting legacy will be that he almost secured independence for Scotland in the biggest democratic experience of our lifetimes. On the one hand, the referendum attracted the highest turnout in any election for decades and was for some people uplifting and engaging, but that experience was, on the other hand, far from being the universal experience. For too many families, friends and communities the referendum was divisive. The First Minister may not wish to accept that, but it will be as much his legacy as all the positive attributes that he would like to be ascribed to him. It will take many years for the wounds to heal and the unity that we once enjoyed to return. I hope that he reflects on that in his retirement.

With the First Minister's resignation a mantle passes from him to me.

Ruth Davidson pointed out that I am now the longest-serving party leader with the privilege of regularly quizzing the First Minister—not by long, but I will take any prizes these days. That I spend Thursday mornings honing and crafting the 200 words to deploy each week is a credit to the standards that Alex Salmond has set for First Minister's questions. That he has been so relaxed about providing answers each week also reflects his political ability.

I was grateful for the kind words that he offered when I returned from my back operation last week. In the same spirit, I hope that the First Minister's arm is healing. As the new veteran leader, I offer some advice to the departing First Minister: we all need to take care of our health. I intend to get back running as soon as possible. I encourage the First Minister to spend some time with his beloved golf clubs, and I am sure that I speak for many when I say that he should take his frustrations out on inanimate golf balls, rather than Opposition politicians.

To lead a Government and a country is a privilege and an honour. I imagine that it can, at times, be an ordeal—every remark analysed, every move studied, every posture photographed. I think that we all recognise that, and the personal commitment that Alex Salmond has made.

I wish him well for the future.

14:51

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): “Nothing lasts forever”, said Francis Urquhart, “Even the longest, the most glittering reign must come to an end.”

Alex Salmond's tenure as First Minister has certainly been long, by the standards of the office. While his supporters might call it glittering, and his critics might compare his record with the worst misdeeds of Francis Urquhart, the truth is probably somewhere in between. I am sure that Mr Salmond's back benchers will understand it if all Opposition leaders feel the need to reflect on some of the lows as well as the highs.

I will start with a low so that I can end on a high; I hope that that is forgivable. I have chosen a low point that allows me to insult someone other than the First Minister. I hope that that, too, is agreeable.

The First Minister may already regret ever falling into the orbit of Donald Trump. A First Minister of Scotland should always try to recognise distinctive Scottish values, which surely embrace an egalitarian approach to life. To enter into dealings with a man who embodies the values of me, me, me, more, more, more, greed and overconsumption—nothing so much as the nauseating values of tea party America—such dealings could never have ended well. What I find bewildering is that the Scottish Government seems about to repeat those mistakes on the other side of the country. I ask the First Minister to take this last opportunity—perhaps his last act before he leaves office—finally to sever all links with that delusional bully. I fear that if he does not, not only his successor but the rest of the country will come to regret it.

Okay, on to the high point. No doubt some would expect me to cite the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009—the moment when Holyrood agreed, without a single dissenting vote, to set clear and binding emission targets. It was a moment to remember, but it was only a half measure of consensus. We agreed on the goal but never on how it was to be achieved. The high point that I credit Alex Salmond with in this area—the important contribution that I want to recognise on this occasion—is not on a target but on an idea. By putting his personal weight behind the concept of climate justice, he helped to advance an argument that will only grow in its global importance in the debate on climate change.

Ours is a wealthy country—a country that contributed greatly to the enlightenment and the industrial revolution that followed; a country that benefited from the carbon age; and, sadly, a country that has still not broken its perilous dependence on the production of fossil fuels. For

such a country to argue that clean, sustainable, low-carbon economic development must be linked to justice between rich and poor, and to the human rights of those who are least responsible for climate change but most acutely affected by it and the damage that we have done and continue to do—that was an important argument to make. Alex Salmond used the office of First Minister to advance that argument and he is due great credit for doing so.

Mr Salmond brings his tenure as First Minister to an end after a referendum that has changed Scottish politics irreversibly. It did not lead to the change that we both sought, although, at 45 per cent, the level of support for independence was certainly higher than many had predicted at the start of the long campaign. The case was advanced, and I do not believe that it will retreat from that point. If and when Scotland ever asks itself that question again, it will do so from a more developed starting point, with few remaining doubts from any part of the political spectrum that Scotland has what it takes to be a successful independent country. It may be that too narrow an emphasis was placed on one particular vision of independence—on one book of answers. That may be a lesson for another time.

However, for now, although the vote went against the yes campaign, the experience has been transformational. The re-engagement with politics, the spectacular turnout, the channelling of understandable and justifiable anger with a broken political system into a constructive and positive movement for change—those are things that Alex Salmond helped to bring about. Indeed, it is possible that they could not have happened without him.

I believe that Scotland has been trying to vote for change for a long time now—in creating this Parliament; in bringing new voices into it; in trying out coalition, minority and then majority Governments; and then, finally, in testing the question of independence at the polling stations. That urge to change our politics, to build something better, will stay with us, and I have no doubt that Alex Salmond will continue to play a significant part, whether here or elsewhere, in ways that will inspire his supporters and infuriate his critics in equal measure. I thank him for his service to Parliament and to the country.

14:56

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Alexander Elliott Anderson Salmond was born to privilege—not the privilege of rank, not the privilege of money, not the privilege of connections, but the overwhelming privilege of being a black bitch. For those who do not understand the term, that is the appellation for

people who are born in Linlithgow. The black bitch that is on the town's crest carries beneath it the motto, "Fidelis", which means "faithfulness", and Alex has been a faithful servant of this Parliament and of this country.

Alex was born with the privilege of caring and nurturing parents and the privilege of a free education, to liberate his potential—the foundations of his ambitions for all our people. From day 1, he was a disruptive influence—being born on hogmanay, he could hardly be otherwise. The parties were somewhat subdued on that particular day. He has been a potent agent for change. His life has been and will remain in the public gaze, but not everything is known, so—

Alex, as sons will do, left the family home, and his mother Mary breathed a great sigh of relief as a certain calm fell over 101 Preston Road, Linlithgow. However, it would be a few years before Alex finally departed. His mother, fed up with his still occupying an entire room in the house, moved all the political impedimenta that he had accumulated, in its many boxes and disorder, into the front garden, and phoned him to remind him that she lived a mere 300m from Linlithgow's recycling centre. Strangely, the garden was soon restored to its natural order, and Mary and Robert had the room in their house back. So, when we read his autobiography—I have the money to buy it waiting here now—we should remember its genesis in that front garden.

Alex's grandfather was a wonderful storyteller, who equipped him with the ability to construct a story, tell a story and seize the imagination.

In May 1961, John F Kennedy committed his country to landing a man on the moon before the decade was out and to returning him safely to earth. It was not known that that could be done and it was not known how it would be done, but Kennedy knew that it had to be done. Alex comes from that mould. He is a formidable leader and a formidable challenger of the status quo. He is a man who sets the rest of us formidable challenges. He is the toughest boss I have ever worked for or with, and the fairest, and he is a team builder. But, however tough he might have been on me or on the rest of us, he has always been tougher on himself. A driven man building on the achievements of our previous three First Ministers, he has raised the bar still further for our next First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.

Alex has always been conscious that we are all here—Parliament, office, life—for but a short passage of time and, hence, that everything is about people. For me, two events illustrate that: one from the referendum campaign and one an echo from a previous campaign. Some 15 years earlier, when I was driving him round Scotland—yes, I used to be Alex Salmond's driver—we came

up an incline and found someone lying in the middle of the road with a beating heart but a tortured mind. Alex was first out of the car to help that person in their distress. Our plans for the day were put on hold until we had returned that person to their family, he had listened to their story and offered help. He gave not a thought for his personal safety on that busy road or for the day's political objectives.

During the referendum campaign that has so recently passed, the most telling moment for me—if, perhaps, not for others—was when Alex met a young man who came up to him and explained politely that he was voting no. Alex did not seek to belittle that young man; he softly regretted the decision that he had made but shook his hand, held his hand and listened to him. If we learn anything from Alex, it is that we must listen, perhaps especially to those with views that differ from our own, however much we do not want to hear them.

Of course, whatever we say to Alex this afternoon, we speak of transition, not of an ending. First Minister's questions will be different and Nicola Sturgeon will put her own stamp on them as Scotland's new leader. We will miss Alex's irritated flick behind the right ear when he judges that the question from the benches to his left is more inadequate than usual. We shall miss his careful checking of the wallet in the hip pocket when he has had a question from the benches to his right. We shall miss his checking that his jacket pocket flaps are out as he remembers his spouse's commands for the day.

I say to Alex, our First Minister—perhaps the last time that I shall address him thus—whatever the future may hold, take from all of us our good wishes, our thanks and our love.

15:02

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I promise that I will be brief, Presiding Officer.

I have small corrections for Jackie Baillie. Saving the world was what Gordon Brown did, not me. It was not in Perth that I was expelled from the party; it was at the Dam Park pavilion in Ayr. She is wrong about YouTube. She should go and look at it again, because I did not walk out—I was flung out. I offer her this in case she is ever in such a position: never go willingly—wait to be expelled, Jackie.

I thought that the rocks would melt with the sun before Jackie Baillie said something nice about me, but I was wrong. She did and I thank her for that. I also thank her for her contribution to First Minister's questions over the past few weeks.

I had no idea that Ruth Davidson was so close to voting for independence. She was on the very cusp, if only we had found the right argument to take her over the finishing line. I was delighted to discover that the achievements of implementing SNP policy between 2007 and 2011 were actually the Conservative Party's achievements.

As Ruth Davidson mentioned Annabel Goldie, I say that, somewhere, there is a video of me doing a toast to the lassies and Annabel doing a reply at the scouts and guides Burns supper just a few years ago. Thankfully, because of a series of injunctions, interdicts and superinterdicts, Annabel and I, acting together, have managed to keep that off YouTube for the time being. If it ever emerges, I fear that we will both have to stay in retirement.

Willie Rennie mentioned that thing about me telling him in a cafe that the SNP was going to win a by-election. I thought that he was a voter—I did not recognise him. [*Laughter.*] I have no doubt that the Liberal Democrats will return; I am just not quite certain what they will return to.

I listened with great care to Patrick Harvie, but I was still left hinging as to whether I am closer to Francis Urquhart or Donald Trump. I say to Patrick that I have always regarded him and his interventions in terms of a critical friend. I thank him for that and for his remarks today.

Stewart Stevenson is right that “black bitch” is a term of huge praise in Linlithgow—it means someone who was born within the sound of St Michael's bells—but it confirms just about everything that my political opponents have ever thought about me. I say to him that he is wrong about the hogmanay celebrations in 1954—my dad went off to the Hearts-Hibs match and was not seen for some considerable time thereafter. Stewart has been my friend and colleague for nigh on 40 years, and I hope that we can do another 40 years together. I thank him for his remarks.

Through you, Presiding Officer, I wish every single member of this Parliament well and say goodbye and good luck. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): First Minister—that is the last time that I will call you that—I record my thanks to you for the courtesy and respect that you have shown to me as Presiding Officer and to the Parliament over the past seven years.

I suspend the meeting until 3.25.

15:07

Meeting suspended.

15:25

On resuming—

Drink-drive Limit

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-11567, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on lowering the drink-drive limit.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Members will be aware that the Scottish Government has long argued that a lower drink-drive limit will save lives and help to make Scotland's roads safer. Some members in the chamber have also long campaigned on that important issue. In particular, I pay tribute to Dave Thompson. He has been a tireless campaigner for a lower drink-drive limit and first raised the matter in Parliament way back in October 2007.

Earlier this month, we saw the 50th anniversary of the first anti drink-drive television adverts in the United Kingdom. The existing drink-drive limit was introduced in 1967. Social attitudes towards drink driving were very different when the limit was first introduced. It is fair to say that, back then—hard as it may be to believe now—many people really did not think that it was irresponsible or dangerous to get behind the wheel of a car after drinking. Since then, attitudes towards drink drivers have, understandably, hardened considerably.

A survey of UK drivers that was published earlier this month found that 91 per cent of people agreed that drink driving was unacceptable, and 92 per cent said that they would feel ashamed if they were caught drinking and driving. In comparison, in 1979, more than half of male drivers and nearly two thirds of young male drivers admitted drink driving on a weekly basis.

However, the sad truth is that there remains a persistent minority who, despite repeated warnings, put their lives and the lives of others at risk by getting behind the wheel after drinking alcohol. In 2012-13, 4,730 people were convicted of drink and drug-driving offences in Scotland's courts. That may be a dramatic fall when it is compared with the 8,145 people who were convicted of those offences in 2003-04, but too many people are still choosing to ignore the warnings and drink and drive.

The consequences of drink driving can be tragic. Drink driving costs lives. That is why it is right that we take action to reduce the risk on our roads.

Last month, the report "Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2013" was published. It revealed that an estimated 580 casualties and

around 10 fatalities were due to drink-drive accidents in Scotland in 2012. The figure for fatalities is a fall on the 2011 figure, but the average for the past four years remains at 20 fatalities. Casualties that resulted from drink-drive accidents have fallen by more than 50 per cent since 2002, from 1,270 to 580. In 2013, 2.4 per cent of drivers who were involved in injury accidents and were asked for a breath test registered a positive reading or refused to take the test.

Although we welcome the reduction in the number of casualties, the figures still show that, over the past four years, an estimated one in 10 deaths on Scotland's roads—20 deaths a year—involved a driver with a blood alcohol reading that is above the current limit. Another 560 people suffer injury, and 100 of them are seriously injured.

Some have said that our efforts should concentrate on strictly enforcing the existing drink-driving limit and that there is no need to reduce it. Let me be clear: that ignores the scientific evidence that the risks of driving under the influence of alcohol start to increase well below the current legal limit. Indeed, a wealth of research indicates that impairment begins with any departure from zero blood alcohol concentration.

With a blood alcohol level of between 50mg and 80mg, drivers' vision is affected, slowing reactions to red lights and tail lights. They are more likely to drive too fast and to misjudge distances when approaching bends. Motorcyclists will find it difficult to drive in a straight line.

British Medical Association evidence shows that the relative risk of being involved in a road traffic crash for drivers with a reading of 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood is 10 times higher than for drivers with a zero blood alcohol reading. The relative crash risk for drivers with a reading of 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood was more than twice the level for drivers with a zero blood alcohol reading.

The independent review of drink and drug-driving law conducted in 2010 by Sir Peter North concluded that reducing the drink-drive limit from 80mg to 50mg will save lives.

The current drink-drive limit has had its day. If we look at the drink-driving limits across Europe, we can see that only the United Kingdom and Malta have a legal blood alcohol limit of 80mg per 100ml of blood. Reducing the limit to a lower level of 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood, to bring Scotland into line with most other European countries, is the right approach and will make Scotland's roads safer.

I first raised the drink-drive limit with the UK Government back in 2008. It is a real shame that it has taken until now to reach the point at which we

are able to reduce the drink-drive limit to make Scotland's roads safer.

The Scotland Act 2012 devolved the power to set the drink-drive limit. We welcomed the fact that we have the power to make Scotland's roads safer through having a lower limit. However, we consider that that limited transfer of power was a missed opportunity. We wanted a package of powers that would allow the police to carry out the breath testing of drivers anytime, anywhere. We also called for powers to allow us to consider differential limits—for example, for young and novice drivers—and the ability to change the penalties for drink driving. However, those powers were not granted by the UK Government.

It is right that this Parliament should have the powers to set appropriate and proportionate penalties for drink driving. I welcome Margaret Mitchell's amendment, which seeks the Parliament's views on drink-driving penalties. I presume that that means that she supports the call for such powers to be granted to this Parliament.

We are clear that the automatic 12-month driving ban is appropriate at the current limit and will remain appropriate at the lower limit. There is strong evidence that drivers with a blood alcohol reading of between 50mg and 80mg are significantly impaired, and an automatic ban is appropriate to deter people from drinking and driving.

We will continue to argue for greater powers to tackle drink driving. The Scottish Government's submission to the Smith commission makes the case that giving this Parliament full responsibility for the law on road traffic offences will help to tackle drink driving, make Scotland's roads safer and address the anomalies in the boundaries between reserved and devolved areas.

We want the lower drink-drive limit to result in less drink driving, not more convicted drink drivers. To ensure that drivers are aware that the lower limit is coming into effect, the Scottish Government yesterday launched a public information campaign that is aimed at informing all adults of driving age in Scotland. The campaign comprises advertising on television, video on demand and radio; partnership and stakeholder engagement; field marketing; website updates; social media; and public relations. It includes material relating to the effects of alcohol the morning after a night out.

Let me be clear. Whatever the limit may be, it should not be forgotten that any level of alcohol impairs driving and that our central message remains "Don't drink and drive."

I am happy to accept the amendments from Labour and the Tories, on the basis that they do not seek to reduce the current period of disqualification as a result of the reduction to

50mg and would welcome the opportunity to consider what further powers might be available and what further action could be taken if we had control over penalties.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the reduction of the drink drive limit, which will help to save lives and make Scotland's roads safer, bringing Scotland into line with most other European countries, and encourages drivers not to consume any alcohol at all before driving.

15:35

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I say at outset that Scottish Labour supports the motion. I will speak to the amendment from Scottish Labour.

We have no reservations in our support for the Government's intentions in this matter. To reduce the drink-drive limit is the right thing to do and this is the right time to do it. If the motion is agreed to and the policy is implemented, we hope and anticipate that it will bring about greater safety on Scottish roads and protect citizens throughout Scotland.

The cabinet secretary was good enough to rehearse the statistics. The situation is maddening, because it does not need to be this way. Few members, and few of the people who are listening to the debate, will not have been touched in some way by an incident in which a driver who was under the influence of drink—not just a drunk driver, as we might imagine them, but someone whose abilities were impaired through alcohol—caused an accident. Such accidents cause enormous angst, injury and sometimes, unfortunately, death.

In 2010, the UK Labour Party commissioned a review from Sir Peter North. He recommended that the blood alcohol content limit be reduced to 50mg, estimating that up to 168 deaths would be saved in the UK in the first year of implementation. It is depressing that the UK Government refused to accept Sir Peter North's recommendations. As the cabinet secretary acknowledged, that was a missed opportunity, which we hope that the UK Government will revisit sooner rather than later.

The measure that we are considering today is a bit like the ban on smoking in public places. Mr MacAskill was right when he said that, in the 1960s and 1970s, people accepted as part of the culture the notion that a man—it was men in particular, I have to say—would get behind the wheel of a motor car while impaired or, as was often the case, drunk. Machismo was involved, and people thought that everyone was able to make a judgment about their fitness to drive.

The introduction of alcometers and breath tests changed things. However, we need to

acknowledge that even in modern Scotland we have been involved in all sorts of arguments about how fairly the technology for detecting impairment is used and that we have made it very difficult for police officers to obtain the evidence that is necessary for prosecution.

I am pleased that much of that is behind us and that we realise that this is a public safety issue, rather than a matter of criminalising members of our community. I do not expect much antagonism in this afternoon's debate. I anticipate that all members will support the Government's intentions.

I have done some research into how the proposed change will affect communities. When Ireland indicated that the standard limit of 80mg per 100ml of blood would be reduced to 50mg per 100ml, the council in Kerry, in south-west Ireland, moved that the proposal should be amended to enable the garda to issue permits to respected members of the local community who would be trusted to drive with a higher level of alcohol in their blood. The idea was debated with some strength and was proposed to the justice secretary in Dublin, but I am pleased to say that no further steps were taken and no decision was offered—the proposal merely fell by the wayside through lack of support.

However, that indicates the concerns that exist in rural communities about the impacts of the changes, which we should acknowledge; hence, the Labour amendment seeks to add a reference to an educational and media campaign to the Government's motion. It is important that we further educate the community. If we tell them 10 times, we will need to tell them 10 times more and 10 times more again. Only when they are personally involved in incidents involving drivers who are under the influence of alcohol do people take these things seriously. We need to get it into the minds of people like me that those drivers are not evil people; they are careless people who do not think ahead of time. The Government and the Parliament have a duty to bring to people's attention now the impacts of what could happen, particularly over the festive period.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Does the member share my view that we should introduce a graduated driving licence scheme for young drivers? The member will know that the proposal is that no alcohol be allowed in a young driver's blood during the training period until they have a full, unrestricted licence.

Graeme Pearson: The member makes an important point, and I would support that proposal. I was at Stranraer academy yesterday and that very issue was raised out of the blue. The young person concerned thought it was very unfair that we would treat young drivers differently from mature drivers such as me, although I raised the

fact that young drivers are statistically more likely to be involved in road accidents whether or not they are impaired through alcohol.

I hope that the Government invests the necessary financial support to ensure that an educational media campaign is launched. I invite the cabinet secretary to examine the possibility of modern-day alcometers being provided to the general public in some form so that they can understand the impact of the alcohol that they consume—I have no knowledge of the cost of such things or whether that would be a practical solution.

I trust that, as the debate progresses, the Parliament will agree that the motion and the Labour amendment should be supported. Subject to the speeches from the Conservative Party in the debate, we will make a judgment on the Conservative amendment.

I move amendment S4M-11567.1, to insert at end:

“, and considers that the accompanying education and media campaign should cover the morning after effects of alcohol”.

15:43

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives support initiatives to make Scotland's roads safer. The pain, heartache and devastation that the victims—and their families—of drunk drivers suffer are, frankly, unimaginable. The new 50mg limit therefore represents an important measure in trying to ensure that no family has to endure that experience.

Last week, it was reported that no fewer than 10,000 officers will be responsible for a drink-driving crackdown over the festive season. We know, depressingly, that, at the same time as those officers are tasked with pulling over vast numbers of people for random spot checks, crimes such as domestic abuse will escalate. Therefore, in seeking to legitimately prioritise manpower to crack down on drink driving over Christmas and new year, it is essential that that deployment be proportionate. That means ensuring that sufficient police officers are available to police housebreakings, thefts, serious and sexual assaults and incidents of domestic abuse.

Since its inception, Police Scotland has attracted justified criticism as a culture of target setting has been exposed. Only a few months ago, concerns about the implementation of Police Scotland's stop-and-search policy were well aired in this chamber, and the targeting of speeding in general and in certain specific areas has attracted adverse headlines.

Although the chief constable states that rank-and-file officers do not have numerical targets imposed on them, in May and July of this year the Scottish Police Authority and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland published reports that highlight—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Ms Mitchell. Sandra White has a point of order.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Could Margaret Mitchell please mention the motion and the amendment that she is speaking to? I have not heard anything about them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for that request for a point of order, but it is not a point of order. The words that Margaret Mitchell chooses to use are a matter for her.

Margaret Mitchell: I suggest that Sandra White should listen carefully—she has obviously lost the thread of the argument.

Those reports highlight perceived pressures on police officers not just to meet but to exceed targets as part of the appraisal process.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Mitchell: I will do in a minute, if Elaine Murray does not mind—I just want to complete this point.

The SPA report identified evidence that “officers perceive a pressure to conduct searches”.

Meanwhile, the HMICS report found evidence that “detailed processes do exist across Scotland to monitor individual officer productivity and their personal contribution towards KPIs and targets.”

Consequently, it is important to stress that lowering the drink-drive limit should not and must not become about providing an opportunity for Police Scotland to fill quotas or meet targets.

Elaine Murray: Could Margaret Mitchell clarify the intention of her amendment? As I read it, the suggestion that the application of penalties for exceeding the drink-driving limit should be proportionate could almost be taken as a suggestion that we should take a more lenient view of people who are found to have a blood alcohol level of between 50mg and 80mg. If that is the intention of the amendment, I think that we would have difficulty supporting it.

Margaret Mitchell: I will come to that point specifically, if Elaine Murray will allow me to develop my argument.

Furthermore, the cabinet secretary has emphasised—as does the motion—that the new drink-drive limit brings Scotland into line with most

of Europe. Despite that, during the consultation phase and the Justice Committee's evidence sessions, the Scottish Government failed to make it clear that although penalties for drink driving in Europe vary widely, they tend to be less severe than those in the UK. In France, for example, the penalty for a driver with a blood alcohol concentration of between 50mg and 80mg is usually a fine, although drivers who are well over the limit face stiffer penalties, including a more substantial fine and a licence suspension of up to three years.

In the UK, the penalties for driving or attempting to drive while above the legal limit, which is currently 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood, are set by Westminster. They include six months' imprisonment, a fine of up to £5,000 and/or a driving ban for at least one year. Those penalties are stiff, so I welcome the Labour amendment, which calls for an education and media campaign to accompany the reduction in the limit to cover the morning-after effects of alcohol. That should help to ensure that an otherwise law-abiding individual does not unwittingly find themselves just marginally over the new legal limit, as a result of which they are criminalised, which could have a far-reaching adverse impact on their livelihood.

The Scottish National Party has made it quite clear that it thinks that the power to change the drink-driving penalties should be devolved to Holyrood, yet, as of last week, no attempt had been made to work with or even to consult Westminster justice ministers on that important issue. As a result, bizarrely, drivers who live in England but who travel in Scotland and who are over the 50mg limit but under the 80mg limit potentially face severe penalties for a crime that has no statutory basis south of the border.

The amendment in my name seeks to achieve two things. First, given past events, it calls on Police Scotland to enforce the new drink-drive limit proportionately rather than as part of a target-setting exercise. Secondly, it encourages debate about the application of penalties for drink driving in Scotland. To date, it is evident that the SNP Government has not fully thought through the full implications of a measure that, if properly and proportionately implemented, has the potential to prevent the misery that can result from drink driving and to save lives.

I move amendment S4M-11567.2, to insert after “roads safer”:

“; considers that the application and penalties imposed should be proportionate.”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches should be of four minutes, and there is time for interventions.

15:49

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I am delighted to be taking part in the debate because, as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice said, I have been campaigning to have the drink-driving limit reduced from 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood to 50mg since I entered the Parliament in 2007.

Indeed, after a chat with the cabinet secretary in 2007, I wrote to him asking him to take action on the matter. I then took part in several debates on the issue: the first in October 2007 and a further two in 2008. I also hosted a number of events in the Parliament. It soon became clear that there was overwhelming support in this Parliament for reducing the drink-driving limit—indeed, one vote in Parliament was unanimous. However, we had no power to do anything about the matter at that time.

After those debates, I continually pressed the matter with the UK Government, which eventually agreed to devolve powers over the issue via the Scotland Act 2012. That was rapidly followed by the Scottish Government announcing in March 2013 its intention to reduce the limit, following consultation. That rapid action by the Scottish Government was music to my ears, and it contrasted markedly with the typical prevarication of Westminster.

Because of the UK Government's position, it has not been easy to get a reduction in the drink-driving limit in Scotland. I believe that many lives have been lost or blighted because of the delays caused by the UK Government. As far back as 1997 and again in 1998, the UK Government said that it intended to reduce the limit to 50mg. However, in March 2000, it announced that, because of possible moves to harmonise drink-driving limits in the European Union, it had decided not to lower the limit. In January 2001, the EU did indeed adopt a recommendation proposing harmonisation of the drink-driving limit at 50mg or below, but the UK Government—true to form—announced that it had no plans to reduce the limit as the recommendation was not binding on member states.

The UK Government continued to procrastinate until it said in the second review of its road safety strategy, published in February 2007, that it would keep the case for a reduction in the blood alcohol limit under review. Then, in June 2007, it said that it was once more in favour of a 50mg limit but wanted to see evidence of enforcement of the current 80mg limit by the police before it published a consultation paper later in the year to gauge public opinion. That consultation paper never appeared, and so the prevarication continued and more lives were lost.

Subsequently, I chased up the UK Government in January 2008 and again in April 2008, when I was told that it was pressing ahead with the consultation and that it would give careful consideration to the views of interested parties in Scotland. With the support of the Scottish Government, I continued to press the matter and, eventually, in 2010 the UK Government agreed to devolve powers over the issue.

As a result of the new law there will undoubtedly be fewer accidents and lives lost in Scotland. However, I regret that a similar reduction in the drink-driving limit will not apply in the rest of the UK to cut the loss of life. Every life is precious, so it can only be a good thing that the new law will result in lives being saved. It is significant that, once it had the power, the Scottish Government acted so quickly—unlike Westminster, where the limit is still 80mg, which is unlike every European country bar Malta.

We are fortunate that we have a Scottish Government that is not in the hip pocket of the big booze companies and therefore has no conflict of interest when enacting legislation for the good of the people of Scotland. Long may that continue. My position on drink driving is this: if you are driving, then do not drink; and if you are drinking, then do not drive.

15:54

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and voice my support for the lowering of the drink-driving limit. Sir Peter North's report indicated that that was a highly appropriate thing to do, and the public clearly support it.

Those driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs endanger themselves and our communities. We should focus on refreshing awareness of the practical steps that can be taken to deal with the problem. The penalties imposed on people need to be effective, acting both as adequate punishment and a deterrent against future drink driving, and they should safeguard the public from the dangers of such activity.

In addition, any changes made to the limit must be accompanied by a complementary public awareness campaign, as Labour proposes. Across the UK each year, there are about 430 deaths and 16,000 injuries because of drink driving and associated drug driving, and a proportionate amount of those occur here in Scotland.

There is strong public support for lowering the drink-driving limit. Estimates show that up to 17 lives could be saved and many injuries could be prevented annually in Scotland by reducing the limit to 50mg per 100ml of blood, which is the standard in most EU countries. There are those

who would argue for an even lower level, but this proposal is a welcome step and, as I say, it is supported by the public.

I invite the minister to address a few issues relating to testing and sentencing for drink-driving offences. Is it correct that the police have unlimited powers to stop cars but may only proceed to a breathalyser test if they suspect that the driver has been drinking? Would the minister want to change that?

The North report asserts that breathalysers have now become much more accurate and thus the statutory option for blood and urine testing is no longer required. The proposal for a breathalyser test level is now, I believe, 25mg. Is that indeed the trigger level that should be adopted? Under the previous rules, flexibility was given up to 40mg, so what will the new guidance be? How long will it take to recalibrate the current testing equipment to the new standards? If we do not get that right, lawyers will, quite rightly, act to protect their clients.

Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that matters of this sort are fully in hand before he introduces the new measure?

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): The recalibration of the breathalyser happened last year. It is very important because the power is reserved, and I think that it would be a great improvement in the future to have that devolved. Does the member agree?

Dr Simpson: I am in favour of that area being devolved appropriately so that we can cover all aspects. We already cover some of them.

Do our Scottish courts have the power to order a permanent removal of licence after the second offence? If there has been a second offence, we should have that power. What is the sentencing guideline for anyone who is caught driving after their licence has been suspended because of drink driving? Additionally, driving while impaired by drugs and alcohol is a growing problem in our country. What is the Scottish Government's view on that?

Finally, I hope that the Government will support the part of my proposed member's bill on alcohol that would ensure that general practitioners are notified of offences such as drink driving, especially when it involves a custodial offence. In all my 30-plus years as a GP, I was never informed that such an offence had been committed. There should also be control over caffeinated alcohol mixes, which can lead to people believing that they are more competent than they are in reality. It is important to limit the caffeine levels in caffeine alcohol mixes, and I hope that the Government will support the part of my bill that deals with that.

We must use the powers that we have already, although I personally support more powers for us to differentiate levels such as those indicated by David Stewart for novice drivers.

I am very disappointed that the UK coalition has backed off from this matter. Its record is as poor in this area as it is in the area of nutrition and tackling obesity. The Scottish Government will have our backing for all reasonable measures to improve public health. I support the motion and welcome the cabinet secretary's support for Labour's amendment.

15:59

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I commend Dave Thompson for his tenacity and the work that he has carried out over the years to bring this change to fruition. I thank him very much for that.

As I and others have mentioned, the majority of people in Scotland support a lower drink-driving limit, which was evidenced in the Scottish Government's consultation. An independent analysis of respondents to the consultation found that 74 per cent believed that the drink-driving limit should be reduced and 87 per cent of those agreed that the blood alcohol limit should be reduced to 50mg per 100ml.

The British Medical Association and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents support the reduction of the drink-driving limit, and we have to ask why. As others have said, the reduction will save lives and, importantly, it will discourage drivers from drinking and driving—that is where the education aspect comes in.

Figures have been bandied about, and I would like to add a few of my own. An average of 20 lives are lost each year through drink driving. Last year, 90 people were seriously injured and 340 people were slightly injured as a result of drink driving. That is totally unacceptable. Drink driving affects all who are involved.

Paul Bassett, general manager of the Scottish Ambulance Service's south-east division, said:

"All too often our ambulance crews have to deal with the tragic consequences of drink driving, which have a devastating impact on families and communities."

Drink driving affects ambulance drivers and rescue workers as well. He also said:

"The message is clear and we hope this initiative will reduce the number of lives that are ruined as a result of drink driving."

No one should drink and drive, and drivers should take responsibility for their actions.

Kathleen Braidwood, road safety officer for RoSPA, said:

"People need to realise that any amount of alcohol impairs a driver's ability to judge speed and distance while behind the wheel. Alcohol also slows reaction times and can make drivers over-confident and more likely to take risks. Lowering the drink-drive limit will not only contribute to making our roads safer but also have a wider social impact."

That is very important. As I said, drink driving affects all aspects of lives.

Graeme Pearson mentioned education and the media. The cabinet secretary has used most of the measures that we have talked about to make the general public aware of the changes, which have been very well outlined. TV, radio, electronic signs both in Scotland and on the border, petrol stations, pubs and retail organisations have been covered very carefully, and I doubt whether anyone would not be aware of the changes that are going to take place. It is incumbent on drivers and others to know what the law is.

I did not quite understand where Margaret Mitchell was coming from earlier—I think that a number of us did not—so perhaps when she sums up we could have more explanation from her.

When the Scottish Government asked the Westminster Government in 2012 for powers to reduce the drink-driving limit, it also asked for powers to make changes to penalties, but the Westminster Government did not give them. Like Richard Simpson, we all agree that we would welcome having those powers here in the Scottish Parliament, so that they could work in tandem with the other powers.

Drink-driving blights lives for everyone and we have to do our utmost to ensure that, as Graeme Pearson said, we do not criminalise people but educate them to the fact that drink driving is not acceptable in Scotland.

16:04

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

The current drink-drive limit was set in 1965. Since then, I am glad to say, perceptions have changed. Public and scientific understanding of the risks has increased dramatically. However, for many folk there is still some confusion as to what the existing limit allows. Is it a pint or a glass of wine? What constitutes a unit, and how many can someone have and still drive legally?

In future the message could not be clearer: if you have had even one drink, you should not drive. The evidence is irrefutable. Drinking even a small amount deteriorates drivers' reaction times, concentration and motoring skills. It can instil false confidence, impair co-ordination and weaken the judgment of factors such as distance and speed.

As we have heard, the number of drink-drive accidents and casualties has halved in recent

years. However, the latest Transport Scotland data shows that there were 440 drink-drive accidents in 2012, causing 580 people to be injured and 10 fatalities.

A 2010 study by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence found that drivers intoxicated to the existing limit, 80mg, were 11 times more likely to be involved in a fatal car crash than drivers who had no alcohol in their blood. Reduced to 50mg, that falls to three times as likely. In short, drinking at all increases the chance of a collision.

Why not adopt a zero-tolerance approach, then? Ideally, no one with alcohol in their system would get behind the wheel. However, we understand that that would cause practical and technical difficulties.

A study by University College London estimates that reducing the limit to 50mg would still prevent 65 deaths and 250 serious injuries a year if adopted across the UK. The evidence from Ireland is that it will encourage a culture change that will deliver year-on-year improvements. That in itself is a great step forward. I hope that the rest of the United Kingdom follows Scotland's lead.

I cannot support the Conservative amendment. I am afraid that Margaret Mitchell did not set out a coherent case for it. The mandatory penalty, which is to lose one's licence for 12 months, is still proportionate for the new level that we are introducing. Of course, judicial discretion allows for exceptional circumstances.

The Justice Committee took evidence on the issue a couple of weeks ago. Chief Superintendent Iain Murray was clear in his evidence to us. He said that lowering or varying the penalty based on the amount of alcohol consumed would reduce the deterrent effect and that we should not take account of

"whether somebody was three times or six times more likely to kill themselves or somebody else."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 October 2014; c 40.]

He was very firm in his view that we should have a single penalty.

Getting the message across to every single driver that there is no safe amount that they can drink before taking control of a vehicle will arguably require the most extensive driver education campaign ever. I have some concerns about whether that can be achieved in just two and a half weeks.

I am sympathetic to Labour's amendment, and I wonder whether the impact of alcohol on drivers the next day needs to be more prominent in the publicity material. How many people know that it can take roughly 13 hours to be alcohol free after drinking four pints of strong lager or ale? As Dr

Rice alluded to in his evidence to the committee, it is still a common misconception that coffee, sleep, a shower, exercise or a full Scottish breakfast will speed up the removal of alcohol from one's system. It does not.

I support the "Don't drink and drive" approach, but it must be accompanied by sufficient education so that we can reach the zero-tolerance approach.

We are able to modify the drink-drive limit using the significant powers devolved through the Scotland Act 2012. Steered by the Liberal Democrat Secretary of State for Scotland Mike Moore, it is testament to our commitment to strengthen the powers of this Parliament. Scottish Liberal Democrats will always support evidence-based efforts to make our roads safer and to save lives; we will therefore back the motion.

16:08

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Drink driving has been a scourge on Scotland's roads for too long, leading to completely unnecessary injuries and deaths, and devastating families and communities across the country. It is absolutely right that the Scottish Government is taking this decisive action.

Around one in 10 deaths on Scotland's roads involve drivers who are over the limit. As Alison McInnes said, having even one drink is enough to make someone three times as likely to be involved in a fatal car crash. That is why lowering the blood alcohol limit is the right thing to do to make our roads safer, save lives and prevent more families from having to deal with losing a loved one as a result of drink driving.

The new limit will send out a clear message that driving after one drink is unacceptable. As other members said, I hope that the rest of the UK will follow Scotland's example on this important issue and come into line with the rest of Europe. I agree with Margaret Dekker of Scotland's Campaign against Irresponsible Drivers, who stated:

"To my mind, it is only a start to eradicating the scourge of drink driving in Scotland."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 October 2014; c 45.]

Our European neighbours have already introduced the same or an even lower limit. A lot of Polish people who live in Scotland know that the limit is a lot lower in Poland, at 20mg. Only in Malta and the rest of the UK will the limit will still be at 80mg after this Parliament passes the relevant measure. For example, the Republic of Ireland lowered its drink-drive limit to 50mg in 2011, with a further lower limit of 20mg for specified drivers, such as those who have recently passed their test.

France, which has a different social attitude towards drink driving, has a 50mg limit, but it has a long tradition of random breath testing. The Justice Committee was told by Dr Rice of Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems that

"15 per cent of French drivers are tested every year, but the numbers who are tested in the UK are in single figures."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 October 2014; c 52.]

There is a case for random breath testing but, unfortunately, it is another of the policy areas that is reserved to Westminster. I remember the numerous road safety campaigns in the French media warning that police will conduct random breath testing on local roads, which worked well.

I am sympathetic to Margaret Mitchell's amendment, but only as it reads, not how she explained it in her speech. I agree that the application and penalties that are imposed should be proportionate. However, I cannot support the amendment now. As we heard at committee, the 50mg limit is proportionate. We have the limit just now and we have the penalties that we have just now. If we are thinking about lowering the limit further at some point, I agree that we will need to have the powers over the penalties devolved here. That will be of benefit to us.

Margaret Dekker, of Scotland's Campaign against Irresponsible Drivers, said:

"We would like to see a zero limit."

A lot of people ask for a zero limit, but I do not particularly agree with that view. As I said, other countries, such as Poland, have a lower limit. If we could have all the powers devolved, I might consider it. We know that the Scottish Taxi Federation supports a zero-tolerance approach, because too many people have been the victims of drink drivers, and the Road Haulage Association supports more stringent drink-driving regulations.

I think that there is a case to have all the relevant powers devolved. Lowering the blood alcohol limit is the right thing to do, and I am looking forward to continuing on the road of eradicating the scourge of drink driving in Scotland.

16:12

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

As a veteran road safety campaigner, I very much welcome the debate this afternoon and, of course, I will be supporting the Scottish Government's motion.

I will focus my remarks on young driver safety. It is appropriate that we are having this debate in road safety week. I will begin by reading part of a blog that was posted by the best friend of a drink-driver. It states:

"We all enjoy our nights out but my mate takes it way too far, he's never aggressive or anything when he's drunk but last Friday night was the tipping point for many of us that go out.

We found out that after 18 pints of Caffreys, 10 JD & Cokes and various shots of liqueurs that he actually drove the 3 miles home. All that started at 5pm and ended at 4am.

This has got to stop, if he'd hit anyone or anything then he would never have known about it."

The blog went on:

"My take on it is that if he is stupid enough to do it then he will have to face the consequences, but it's not just him that would suffer ... So would his wife, his three kids and god forbid the poor ... family of the person that he hits."

Having spent years campaigning for driver safety, I have learned a lot about the tragedies that are involved in drink driving and have spent a lot of time thinking about the solutions to this crucial aspect of driver safety. The trigger for me was the tragic death of two 17-year-olds in March 2010, which were directly linked to drink driving.

It is a truism that is not depleted by repetition that there is no greater tragedy, no greater sorrow and no greater loss than for a parent to lose a child. That tragedy in the Highlands led me to set up a local group called the north of Scotland driver awareness team, which led to local campaigns in the Highlands and Islands called sensible driving, always arriving.

Although drink driving appears to be a single issue, as many members have mentioned it is in fact a diverse problem that includes various dimensions such as alcohol abuse, underage drinking and other social concerns, as identified in the North review and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence report of 2010. Therefore, the solutions need to be equally intricate and wide-ranging. The issue demands a comprehensive, creative and flexible approach.

Dave Thompson: Does David Stewart agree that, to deal with the full range of issues, we need all the powers relating to the matter to be devolved to the Parliament?

David Stewart: I welcome the work that Dave Thompson has done on drink driving. As Dr Richard Simpson mentioned, there are strong arguments for devolving day-to-day administration of the matter, so I support the thrust of Dave Thompson's comments.

It is important to view drink driving in the broader context of the public health implications of alcohol abuse, so the solutions must take into account drinking patterns and those groups that are particularly at risk.

As a Highlands and Islands road safety campaigner, I welcome any measures that will improve road safety and reduce fatalities and

serious injuries as a result. It is a tragedy that, every year, one death in 10 on Scottish roads involves a driver who is over the drink-driving limit. Every year, an average of 30 deaths on Scottish roads are caused by drivers who are over the legal limit. In 2010, there were 750 casualties and 20 deaths as a direct result of drink driving. In 2011, there were 680 casualties and 20 deaths as a direct result of alcohol.

Of course, I heartily welcome the proposal to lower the permitted blood alcohol level in Scotland—a power conferred by the Scotland Act 2012—and look forward to the UK Government following our lead for the rest of the UK as soon as possible. I would welcome the speedy introduction of such legislation.

We need a clear and unambiguous message. If someone is driving, they should not drink. They should not do the lottery with their career or force other road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists, to do the same. If they do, they will face the consequences.

International best practice suggests that the countries that have the lowest drink-driving figures have three things in common: a long track record of drink-driving enforcement; a high level of detection; and mass media support for enforcement.

For young drivers in particular, graduated licence schemes with restrictions on passengers, night driving and zero tolerance of alcohol will, along with increased education, reduce the carnage on our roads and reduce deaths and injuries throughout Scotland.

16:17

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I will address both amendments. The first one—Graeme Pearson's—is absolutely fine and dandy. In fact, a great deal of the committee conversation and interrogation of witnesses a week or so ago was about the morning-after effects of alcohol. It was mostly concerned with people being unsure about whether they would be caught the next day—quite innocently, having been at a wedding perhaps.

I do not understand Margaret Mitchell's amendment so perhaps she can clarify in her closing speech. I will read out the motion as it would be amended:

"That the Parliament supports the reduction of the drink drive limit, which will help to save lives and make Scotland's roads safer; considers that the application and penalties imposed should be proportionate".

Does it mean that the 50mg limit should not be applied to some people who are stopped and are

over it? Does it also mean that, if it is applied to them, they should not have a mandatory ban for the year? We cannot do that; there is mandatory banning. The 50mg limit is just being substituted for the 80mg one.

Margaret Mitchell *rose*—

Christine Grahame: No, I have only four minutes. I want to support Margaret Mitchell's amendment but she will need to clarify what it means, for goodness' sake.

The committee wholly supported the reduction to 50mg in 100ml. We were concerned not about people having a drink in the pub and then taking to their car, which they should not do, but about what happens the morning after. As my colleague has stolen my line about the Scottish breakfast, I return to my own line, which is that Irn-Bru and a bacon roll and just having a cold shower and taking a walk with the dog will not do; people will still be over the limit.

The medical evidence was that the liver functions like goods going through the supermarket checkout: things can only go through one at a time, and each drink has to go through at a certain rate; it cannot go through more quickly in any way. I hope that members can follow the metaphor—I did at the time.

However, for me, the most important thing is information, and not only over Christmas. When we move into the summer and spring, people are out in the sun having wine and so on. We need cross-border information. That is particularly important in the Scottish Borders.

I know that there are going to be electronic signs on gantries on the motorways, but I suggest that there should also be signs at motorway service stations—I see the cabinet secretary nodding, so he is obviously ahead of me on that. I am glad that the adverts are on ITV Border, to give it a wee plug. We do not get STV in the Scottish Borders, so it was important that ITV Border was encapsulated in the advertising.

Unlike my usual style, I am going to be a bit controversial. I know that this issue is not devolved, but I am slightly concerned about random testing, not because I in any way support people drinking and driving but because random testing for me strays into the area of civil liberties. We have been there with stop and search. The police said that most stop and searches are consensual, but if a policeman asks to search someone, the person will think that they will be on shaky ground if they say no, so they will probably just say yes, because they have nothing to hide. The public say that they do not mind random testing, but I do not know whether every motorist who is pulled over for no reason whatever and who then rolls down their window and has a

policeman lean in to see whether they can smell any alcohol on their breath will be that happy. There is a balance between taking the public with us and saying that people can just be stopped in any event.

We all know about when the police stop someone, who then rolls down their window and is told, "Hen, your brake light's not functioning"—we all know fine what that is about. However, the police said in evidence to the Justice Committee that they can stop people anyway, without having any cause for concern about how they are driving or the condition of their vehicle. I did not know that that was the case, and I would like the situation to be clarified. I leave that with the cabinet secretary. Everybody says that they are in favour of random testing, but if we had the power and we started to do it on a large scale, the public might get a little bit worried. I can see that Monsieur Allard does not agree—I said that I would be controversial—but I think that the issue is worth considering.

16:21

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Reducing the drink-drive limit is important, and I fully agree with the motion and the Labour Party's amendment.

The UK currently has the highest drink-drive alcohol limit in the European Union at 80mg per 100ml of blood. There is clear evidence that a reduction to 50mg per 100ml will reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries that are caused by drink driving. Estimates of how many lives can be saved with a lower limit vary, but there is evidence that between three and 17 lives could be saved per annum on Scottish roads.

The risk of getting into a crash significantly rises once blood alcohol levels go above 50mg in every 100ml of blood. Along with the strong evidence base for reducing the drink-drive limit on 5 December, there is widespread support from external organisations such as the British Medical Association and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. They are professionals who deal daily with our ailments in our health service and who deal with accidents.

The Government needs to ensure that the proposals are fully resourced so that Police Scotland has the support that it needs to implement the policy. That should include resources to educate drivers about the changes in the law. The cabinet secretary has set out clearly how he will ensure that the message gets through, but he should be aware that people in a lot of communities, particularly youngsters, could benefit from such education and advice.

Personally, I am in favour of reducing the drink-drive limit to a much lower level. I realise that a zero level could cause problems, as certain food,

medication and perhaps even mouthwashes can have an impact on breath tests. However, I feel that, in future, reducing the limit to a nominal level such as 0.5mg per 100ml would get rid of a lot of confusion about how much one can drink before getting behind the wheel of a vehicle. The important fact is that loss of life or limb and disruption to family life are far too high a price for us to pay, so we should secure such levels. It is pure madness to allow people in our society to continue to put at risk not only themselves but many others.

As a councillor, I have seen first hand the hardship that families have to go through either because someone's conviction for drink driving results in loss of employment or loss of other amenities or because victims have been injured, through no fault of their own, and the families have had to pick up the pieces. Sometimes we underestimate the value that we lose when someone is injured or has lost their life because of drink driving.

I am also keen for the cabinet secretary to look at the issue of all the people who use machinery, such as divers, pilots, drivers and train drivers—we need to look at them as well, not simply car drivers. I hope that the cabinet secretary will take that message on board and I look forward to his future proposals.

16:26

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): As already stated, a drink-driving limit has been in place since 1965. Since then, social attitudes towards those who drink drive have changed; they have changed dramatically since the 1960s, with most people taking a hard-line stance on the issues surrounding drink driving. I would go as far as to say that the people of Scotland have developed a strong social conscience towards the issue of drink driving and are clear that drink driving can have devastating effects.

Despite that, I am disappointed to note that an estimated 20 lives each year continue to be lost on Scotland's roads as a result of drink driving, not to mention the serious injuries that are sustained by members of the public. That is why I am pleased that the Scottish Government has decided to lower the drink-driving limit. I was also encouraged by the results of the Scottish Government consultation, which showed that the vast majority of people who responded would support a lower drink-driving limit in Scotland. In fact, just short of 75 per cent of respondents said that they would support a lower drink-driving limit. I believe that that reinforces the idea that our nation has a social conscience on the issue.

The new drink-driving limit that is in place from 5 December will make Scotland's roads safer as it allows the police, prosecutors and our courts to take more drivers off the road who pose a risk to public safety. It will also act as a deterrent—it will encourage people not to drink and drive at all, particularly as the new limit is coming into force in the lead-up to the festive period, when many may have been tempted to have a drink and then drive after an office party or a family gathering.

When I first started driving, I—like anyone else—would have a couple of pints. Then I met someone who was stopped one night whose couple of pints had put him over the limit. Then, I went down to one pint and I said, "Why should I?" But then I thought, "I don't want to be caught. I don't want to drink and drive." Therefore, now when I take friends out, I drink orange juice and I still enjoy my night.

With that in mind, the Scottish Government is doing all that it can to ensure that the public is properly informed about the change in the drink-driving limit. The campaign was launched on the 17th of this month and includes TV and radio adverts across Scotland as well as a robust social media campaign.

The new drink-driving limit brings Scotland into line with most other European countries. As has already been stated, the Republic of Ireland is an example of good practice and of the benefits of the lower limit. A review of its policy that was published in December 2012 found that the number of arrests for drink driving between October 2011 and October 2012 had fallen compared with the 2010 statistics, which was the last calendar year in which the higher limit was in force. Drivers in the Republic of Ireland have adjusted their behaviour to take into account the lower limit. That evidence is encouraging and I hope to see the same reduction in Scotland.

I encourage all members to support the lower drink-driving limit as it will make our roads safer and save lives. Even with the lower limit, someone is still three times—three times—more likely to die in a crash than if they had taken no alcohol. The best advice that we can give—I am sure that many members have already said this—is for people to have no alcohol if they plan on driving. As has also been stated already, people need to remember that what they drink the night before is still in their system the next morning.

16:30

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): Reducing the drink-drive limit will make Scotland's roads safer. We all know that alcohol affects a driver's judgment and reaction times, and that the risk of having a road accident increases

as more alcohol is consumed. However, we also know that Scotland and the United Kingdom have one of the highest drink-drive limits in Europe.

Sir Peter North, in his report for the UK Government in 2010, recommended a reduction in the drink-drive limit from 80mg to 50mg per 100ml, which would bring us into line with the vast majority of our European neighbours. It is the rejection of that recommendation by the current UK Government, coupled with the devolution of the power to set a specific limit for Scotland, that has led to this debate.

I make it clear at the outset that I support the reduction in the drink-drive limit, and that I discourage all forms of drink driving in the strongest possible terms. However, I believe that Labour's amendment enhances the Government's motion.

In his report, Sir Peter North explained—as Richard Lyle stated—that drivers with a blood alcohol concentration between 20mg and 50mg per 100ml have a greater risk of dying—at least three times the risk—in a road traffic accident than drivers who have no alcohol in their blood at all.

The risk of having a fatal accident increases by at least six times with a blood alcohol concentration between 50mg and 80mg per 100 ml, and then to 11 times between 80mg and 100mg per 100 ml. In other words, alcohol increases the risk of a fatal accident exponentially, and there is a significant increase in risk above a blood alcohol concentration of 50mg per 100ml.

The report notes that there is a case for reducing the limit to 20mg per 100ml, which Sir Peter North argues would be consistent with a clear "Do not drink and drive" policy. However, he goes on to explain that only a minority of countries have such a limit, and that any policy that is viewed as too restrictive or inflexible could jeopardise the good will and public support that exist for strengthening drink-drive legislation.

The BMA has reminded us that the lowest drink-drive limits are the toughest to enforce. There are countries that have a drink-drive limit of zero, and yet there are circumstances in which people with a medical condition such as diabetes, or those who use a certain type of mouthwash, would register alcohol in their blood.

The recommendation that we should reduce the limit on blood alcohol concentration to 50mg per 100ml has proven to be popular not only in the chamber but beyond with the public, the police and road safety campaigners. It is a practical proposal, it is enforceable and it will save lives.

There is broad agreement that the coming change must be communicated effectively to the public before it comes into force on 5 December.

Thirty-two responses to the Scottish Government's consultation emphasised the need to educate drivers about changes to the drink-drive limit, and 13 identified the need to educate people about the lingering morning-after effects of alcohol.

It takes longer than people often think for alcohol to pass through their body. People who would never countenance drink driving might not realise how much alcohol remains in their system the morning after a night out. They could find that their reaction times are slow, and if they were stopped by the police they might find that they have broken the law.

We need to do more than educate drivers to know their limits and know their units. We need to change behaviour and prevent people from getting behind the wheel of a car in the morning when there could still be enough alcohol present in their system to take them over the limit.

I acknowledge the new public awareness campaign that was launched this week, but I appeal to the Government for assurances that the attempts to educate motorists will be robust and proactive and will continue beyond the festive season.

With a new drink-driving limit I hope that we can prevent needless accidents, injuries and deaths on Scotland's roads. We can make people think more about how much they drink before they drive, and send out a clear message that it is safest not to drink at all before getting behind the wheel. With education and enforcement, we can make Scotland's roads safe, and I believe that we must.

16:34

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

The drink-driving limit is an important subject, and no more so than at this time of year. As has been well discussed today, the consequences of drink driving can be traumatic not only for individuals who are involved in accidents, but for those who are left behind. As the cabinet secretary said, social attitudes change. Just as, as a society, we know that people taking on board the dire effects of smoking led to a change in public attitudes, I believe that the overwhelming majority of the public share the views of those who participated in the Government's consultation on drink driving. Drink driving not only causes trauma and costs lives, but impacts on an already stretched health service. Therefore, as other members have done, I welcome the proposals.

We have heard a lot today about the morning after. I agree with members who said that it should be a key theme of public education campaigns, especially at this time of year. Chief Superintendent Murray said in evidence to the Justice Committee that 10 per cent of detections in

last winter's drink-driving campaign were made after 6 o'clock in the morning. We also heard good evidence from Dr Rice. I particularly liked his straightforward comment that

"whatever magical properties people endow Irn Bru, bacon rolls or square sausage with, that is all they are. Basically, time is the only thing that clears alcohol from your system".—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 October 2014; c 43.]

We all need to apply common sense. Someone who is out at an office party until 1 in the morning should not assume that they will be fit to drive or function by breakfast time. As others have said, they should use public transport or—better still—walk.

I welcome the general thrust of the regulations. Scotland needs to be in the mainstream of Europe. Only Malta and England and Wales seem likely to stick with the 80mg limit, and I note with interest the new 20mg limit in Northern Ireland for learner and novice drivers. To be frank, I am baffled about why the UK Government can agree to that provision in Northern Ireland but will not allow the Scottish Government and Parliament even to consider the prospect.

The Justice Committee did, of course, discuss that issue in its evidence-taking session. Chief Superintendent Murray expressed the view that to increase the limit for younger drivers from 20mg to 50mg, perhaps after they have held a licence for two years, would send out the wrong message, whereas Dr Rice suggested that the BMA would favour such an approach. The evidence on the issue is finely balanced.

Margaret Dekker of Scotland's Campaign against Irresponsible Drivers suggests that there should be a lower limit for professional drivers such as taxi drivers, school bus drivers and anyone who drives in a care capacity. Hanzala Malik referred to that. The idea has much to commend it, although it was rejected by the North review. I agree with that review, however, on the need to review after five years the impact of a new prescribed limit in relation to young and novice drivers and, at that point, to consider again a reduction to 20mg for such drivers if the evidence suggests that the anticipated reduction in casualty figures for them has not materialised.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Justice indicated in evidence to the Justice Committee, Scotland does not at present have powers over random breath testing, even if the police would like us to have them. As has already been made clear today, whatever the merits of an approach to disqualification that would allow courts not to automatically disqualify drivers who are convicted of driving with levels of between 50mg and 80mg—or for that matter between 20mg and 50mg—this Parliament does not currently have

those powers. At the risk of being accused of raising the constitutional issue again, I note that the distinction between limits and penalties is something that the public will find increasingly difficult to understand. It is increasingly difficult to accept that we should be in charge of one but not the other.

I welcome the proposals and I hope that the public education campaign will be a success and that we can look forward to a reduction in road casualties this Christmas. That would be a Christmas worth having.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

We turn to closing speeches. I call Alex Johnstone.

16:38

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

Anyone who is familiar with the works of Robert Burns, and in particular with "Tam o'Shanter", will know about the difficulties that people face in managing their transport after they have had a skinful. Historically, taking a horse home is something that has happened recently in Scotland, where it was quite often the tradition that a farmer would go off to the mart and drink heavily at the end of the day's work, after which somebody would tip him into his gig and his pony would take him home because it knew the way. Tradition dictates that such things happen. Perhaps the horse was the driverless car before such a thing had been invented.

Attitudes have changed, and motor vehicles have made it much more important that we address the issue. Drinking to excess and driving has been illegal since 1967, of course, but the message that we all need to be prepared to get out now is that it is not acceptable to drink any amount of alcohol before driving. We need a defined limit so that we can easily identify people who have crossed it and prosecute them effectively.

A number of issues have been thrown up during the debate. There are concerns about people who have drunk heavily and who may be surprised to discover that they are still under the influence the following day. That will require significant levels of education urgently if the limit is to be introduced on 5 December. Conservative members happily support that reason and the other reasons behind the Labour Party's amendment.

On the Conservative Party's amendment, we were very pleased at the reaction that we got from Kenny MacAskill at the start of the debate. The objective of our amendment is to introduce the idea that it may at some point in the future be possible—perhaps even necessary—to consider variable application of penalties. We should look at

the situation that we find ourselves in with this legislation. Simply to take the penalties that are currently applied to people with 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood and apply them to those with 50mg is all well and good, but there is an argument that we should consider for the future whether those who have over 80mg or some other level should be penalised to a greater extent.

Similarly, we have spoken about the possibility of new powers that would allow us to consider lower or different limits for different people, at the lower end of the scale. It would be reasonable to have in advance a good understanding of the possibilities of variable penalties at that end of the scale, too.

We urgently need to understand what we are trying to achieve. We must enforce the drink-driving limit effectively, and it is possible to enforce the 50mg limit, but we must educate people so that they understand that they should not drink and drive.

A number of comments have been made that tell us what the real problem is. The minister spoke about a persistent minority who continue to drink and drive. We heard David Stewart talking about an individual who claimed in a blog, I think, to have driven after having drunk 18 pints. The reduction of the limit from 80mg to 50mg will not affect such individuals. We therefore have a challenge in front of us.

We have the opportunity to encourage people to take a much more responsible attitude. We need to ensure that we have a proper attitude to enforcement and that the resources are made available to ensure fair and effective enforcement.

I, too, give my backing to the cabinet secretary's statement that we want fewer drink drivers, not more convictions. However, that perhaps contradicts the experience that past practices in, for example, policing speed on our roads, have perhaps led to an emphasis on catching those who are easiest to catch, and who are most likely to admit their guilt and accept their penalties, whereas others have tended to be treated less severely in enforcement.

Christine Grahame: Will Alex Johnstone take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is just closing.

Alex Johnstone: It is very important that we understand that the change will save lives, but it will raise questions. We must enforce and educate effectively, and ensure that resources are properly targeted in order to achieve the maximum effect from the change in the law. For that reason, we will support the amendments and the motion at 5 o'clock.

16:44

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I commend David Thompson and David Stewart for the amount of work that they have done on road safety over the years.

Prior to the Road Safety Act 1967, it was a crime to be in charge of a car while unfit to drive through drink or drugs, but there was no reliable test for measuring whether a driver was unfit. In fact, it had been an offence for people to be drunk and in charge of carriages, horses, cattle or steam engines since 1872.

I am old enough to remember—I did not drive at the time—when the Minister for Transport in Harold Wilson's Government, Barbara Castle, introduced the breathalyser to considerable public outcry. In fact, I remember a Christmas episode of "Steptoe and Son", in which Harold was breathalysed while drunk in charge of Hercules, and then poured opprobrium on the transport minister for introducing the breathalyser. I hope that there is no such public reaction against Mr MacAskill or the Parliament when we pass the legislation.

The combination of the introduction of the first approved breathalyser and the Government-run advertising campaign reduced the United Kingdom's percentage of road traffic accidents in which alcohol was involved from 25 to 15 per cent—a reduction of 1,152 deaths—in the breathalyser's first year. That shows how bad it was at the time, but it also shows how legislation can have a good effect. The latest statistics in 2011 indicate that 230 people died in alcohol-related accidents across the United Kingdom. That is 230 people too many.

As the cabinet secretary said, public attitudes to drink driving have changed. Driving after having drunk alcohol was, prior to the Road Safety Act 1967, fairly normal practice. Indeed, the limits in the act appear to condone driving after moderate drinking. It still is possible—for the time being—to go to the pub for an evening and drink a couple of pints and, as Richard Lyle said, not be over the legal alcohol limit. That must no longer be the message that we put out.

Fifty years on from the first advert proclaiming the hazards of drink driving it is timely that the limit is being reconsidered. In 1967, the UK may have been ahead of other countries, but as others have said, we are now behind them: the limit in the majority of European countries is now 50mg per 100ml and in some it is 20mg.

We agree that it is time that Scotland caught up. The former UK Secretary of State for Transport, Lord Adonis, commissioned Sir Peter North's review—which Richard Simpson and Margaret McCulloch mentioned—to consider the case for

changing the drink-driving limit in the United Kingdom. He concluded that the limit should be 50mg. His evidence suggested, as others have said, that an accident involving a driver with 80mg alcohol per 100ml blood was six times more likely to result in death than one involving a driver who had drunk no alcohol.

It is curious that the UK Government refused to act on Lord North's recommendations. However, I am pleased that the devolution of the power to alter the drink-driving limit in the Scotland Act 2012 has given this Parliament, once again, the power to take the lead in the UK—as we did with the ban on smoking in public places—and to bring down the limit to 50mg.

Instead of driving after consuming a small amount of alcohol continuing to be permissible, the message has to be that people should not drink at all if they are intending to drive. Many drivers take that approach. I have spoken to my three children—they are adults and they all drive—who would not even dream of having a drink before driving. We want to encourage that to be the normal approach.

Educating drivers about the changes is vital and it needs, as our amendment says, to make drivers aware of effects the next day; this is an opportunity to remind drivers that they must remember that alcohol can still be in their system the day after drinking. People have various remedies for drinking too much, including drinking fizzy drinks made from iron girders, but none of those remedies work—as others have said. It is especially important at this time of year that, when festive nights out might involve heavier drinking than normal or late night or early morning drinking as workmates go to the pub and then on to meals or night clubs, drivers need to think about what they have consumed and when before taking out the car the following day.

As members can see, I am a fairly small female—I weigh about 50 kilograms. I did an experiment with my partner, who is a lot bigger than me. We bought a breathalyser and, in the safety of our home, we monitored how quickly our blood alcohol concentrations went up and came back down again. For people my size, the concentration goes up faster, so they stop drinking or slow down sooner. However, they process the alcohol at the same rate and it gets out of their system faster. The lesson for larger people is that although they may be able to drink more, the alcohol will stay in their system for longer, so they need to be careful the next day. A person may feel fine but not be capable of driving.

The lesson needs to get out that, irrespective of how good a person feels—they may not have a hangover; they may feel fine—they may not be

capable of driving. People, especially at this time of the year, need to think about that.

I have difficulty with the Conservative amendment and cannot support it, because I think that its interpretation is difficult. If we say that

“the application and penalties ... should be proportionate”

it sounds as if we are saying that the way in which sheriffs and Police Scotland act should be proportionate to the amount that people have had to drink, which might be interpreted as meaning that Police Scotland and sheriffs should take a more lenient attitude to people who fall between the 50mg and 80mg limits. That would muddy the waters. If the Government chooses to support the amendment, we will certainly not vote against the amended motion. However, I think that the Conservative amendment puts out a mixed message and suggests that some kind of proportionate response will result from our bringing down the drink-driving limit.

We have to be clear and we must not dilute the message that the legislation is intended to convey. That message is that it is not safe to drink and drive; that people who will be driving should not drink anything at all; and that those who were drinking the night before—in particular at this time of year, when people drink more and drink later—must think about what they have had to drink, and should not, if there is any chance that they could still be over the limit the next day, go out and drive.

As I said, there are machines that we can buy that test our blood alcohol content, so if there is any chance that a person is over the limit—or indeed might show anything over a low reading—they should test themselves, so that if there is any alcohol in their system they do not drive. If we are to improve our country's road safety record, we need to take the issue very seriously. We need to get the lesson out to the public that the days of driving with alcohol in one's system are no more.

16:51

Kenny MacAskill: This has been a remarkably consensual debate, in the main. We expect no less when we are talking about lives that have been lost and lives that we seek to save.

For that reason, and notwithstanding Elaine Murray's point, we accept the spirit of the Tory amendment. The Government has given a clear assurance that although we seek the devolution of more powers and are prepared to consider points that Hanzala Malik, Richard Simpson and other people have made, which I will come to, we see no basis on which the reduction from 80mg to 50mg would ever lead to a variation in the mandatory disqualification period of one year—or

longer, for subsequent offences or depending on the circumstances of the first offence.

We accept the spirit of the Labour Party's amendment and agree that there must be an information campaign. I hope to assure members that that can be done. Equally, there perhaps needs to be further focus, and we welcome that.

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I am still somewhat confused. I heard what the cabinet secretary just said and what he said in his opening speech about the Conservative amendment, but neither of the Conservative Party speakers could properly explain the amendment. I have read it again to ensure that I am not making a mistake. It says that

"the ... penalties imposed should be proportionate",

but neither speaker could say clearly what that means. I remain very concerned about the implications of the Conservative amendment.

Kenny MacAskill: I am satisfied that our judiciary imposes proportionate sentences. If a sentence is thought to be disproportionate, we have an appellate court and, ultimately, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission—which I think would be invoked very rarely in the context of a drink-driving offence. I am happy to accept the spirit of the amendment, although I thought that some of the Conservatives' comments about the attitudes and actions of the police were rather begrudging.

This is about saving lives. Significant progress has been made and Scotland's roads are safer as a result of a variety of factors that have been brought into play by Governments north and south of the border. Attitudes have changed.

However, it is important that we remember that alcohol-impaired drivers cause their own deaths and the deaths of their passengers and other road users, including people who were just minding their own business. As I recall, last year's Christmas road traffic awareness campaign featured a woman who had lost her husband. Her children had seen their father slain when a driver slewed across the road and hit him. The victim was a pedestrian. He was not on the road; he was walking home after a night out, minding his own business, when a driver who was impaired by alcohol lost control and took his life, making his wife a widow and causing his children to lose their father. It is about saving the lives of not just people on the road but pedestrians, who frequently suffer.

As Graeme Pearson and Richard Lyle mentioned, attitudes have changed, understandably and appropriately. Looking back, I see that the attitudes of my friends and perhaps even my own attitude have firmed up and changed over the years. However, it is not just attitudes that

have changed. Roads have changed significantly since 1967 and traffic is significantly heavier, meaning that the consequences of a moment's inattention can be much greater now than they were all those years ago. The power and capacity of vehicles is also significantly greater. I have a vehicle with a 1,200cc capacity, and the power, speed and acceleration of the car that I have in 2014 are significantly greater than those of an engine of a much greater capacity all those years ago. The world has changed and we need to change with it.

I give Margaret Mitchell the assurance that the police will provide the same resources. I do not know of any officer who goes round seeking to meet targets or to climb lists. I know of officers who themselves have been traumatised, and I do not know a police officer who does not take drink-driving seriously. They see the consequences and have to report the bad news to the families, so they, more than anybody, are aware of the action that must be taken.

Nevertheless, I accept that we should go further. Ireland lowered its limit, as members from all sides of the chamber have said. However, when Ireland lowered its limit from 80mg to 50mg, it added a further limit of 20mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood for specified drivers—this echoes Dave Stewart's point—meaning learner drivers, those who have recently passed their test and those who drive in a professional capacity such as bus and truck drivers. In Scotland, train drivers, ferry operators and plane pilots have a limit of 35mg, but that is not regulated by the Scottish Government; it is reserved to Westminster. The only power that we have is the power to lower the drink-driving limit, and that is what we have done. When we get other powers, we will look to replicate what has happened in Ireland.

The Road Safety Authority in the Republic of Ireland undertook a review of the lower drink-driving limits in the year following their introduction and found that, notwithstanding the lower drink-driving limits that were introduced in October 2011, the total number of arrests for drink driving had fallen slightly. I think that that happened because—this touches on something that Elaine Murray talked about—the campaign hammered home the message that people should not risk drink driving. The chief executive of the Road Safety Authority, Noel Brett, commented:

"Since 2007, the number of drivers being detected driving under the influence of alcohol has more than halved. Clearly, the introduction of Random Breath Testing in July 2006 and the lowering of the Drink Drive Limits in October of 2011 have been the principal factors behind this drop."

We do not have the ability to set graduated limits or, indeed, the 20mg and 50mg limits that Ireland has, nor do we have random breath

testing. I say to Christine Grahame that the police can stop any car but they cannot randomly breath test unless they have a suspicion that alcohol has been consumed. That is why they ask the driver to open the window. It may be a moot or tautological point, but I think that random breath testing has a place. It has certainly worked in the Republic of Ireland, and I think that the Scottish Parliament should have the power to introduce random breath testing if it wished to do so.

The experience in the Republic of Ireland was that people got the message that they should not drink and drive—that they could not have even two drinks, as Richard Lyle mentioned. However, there are still those who go out to a Christmas party and think that if they stay for the meal they can have a glass of wine and that if they stay for the dance they can have another drink and—lo and behold—they then get into the car.

There is an appropriate argument about the situation the morning after, but the police have been driving home the message about that in recent years. There was a time when nobody gave any consideration to what the situation would be the following morning. However, over recent years, the police have been driving home the message that if people are out drinking—whether at a Christmas party or at any other time of the year—they should make alternative arrangements for the following day. I give members an assurance that we have an appropriate advertising campaign that will run beyond the Christmas/hogmanay period and that we will ensure that those who contemplate driving the following day are aware of their responsibilities behind the wheel of a vehicle.

I end as I started, by paying tribute to Dave Thompson. Some members have the privilege of introducing a member's bill. Because the matter is reserved, we have not been able to do that in this case, so it is being dealt with by subordinate legislation. It is, nevertheless, the political equivalent of a member's bill introduced by Dave Thompson, who, since he became a member of this Parliament, has campaigned ceaselessly to lower the drink-driving limit. He has made Scotland a safer place. [*Applause.*]

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-11549, on the approval of the draft Road Traffic Act 1988 (Prescribed Limit) (Scotland) Regulations 2014.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Road Traffic Act 1988 (Prescribed Limit) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-11567.1, in the name of Graeme Pearson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11567, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on lowering the drink-drive limit, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-11567.2, in the name of Margaret Mitchell, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11567, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on lowering the drink-drive limit, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)

McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (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)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

Abstentions

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 70, Against 37, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-11567, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on lowering the drink-drive limit, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament supports the reduction of the drink drive limit, which will help to save lives and make Scotland's roads safer; considers that the application and penalties imposed should be proportionate, bringing Scotland into line with most other European countries; encourages drivers not to consume any alcohol at all before driving, and considers that the accompanying education and media campaign should cover the morning after effects of alcohol.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-11549, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Road Traffic Act 1988 (Prescribed Limit) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 [draft] be approved.

MUMs' Last Big Challenge

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-11093, in the name of Alex Fergusson, on MUMs' last big challenge. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the ongoing work of the charity, Malawi Underprivileged Mothers (MUMs), which was founded in 2005 by Linda McDonald, who worked in Edinburgh, to raise funds for improvements at Bwaila Hospital in Lilongwe; further notes the support that MUMs has given to Charity Salima and the Achikondi clinic, which is a maternity clinic established by Charity Salima using her own resources, which now helps to deliver between 40 and 50 babies per month, provide ante- and post-natal care to mothers and babies, runs an under-fives clinic and provides HIV testing and family planning advice; is concerned that the clinic's privacy has been compromised, but notes that Charity Salima has begun to build a new purpose-built clinic with a 17-bed capacity; recognises that MUMs has launched a challenge to raise the £15,000 required to complete the clinic by the end of December 2014 and commends the charity pack that it has made available to individuals and organisations challenging them to raise £100 toward the target, and wishes Linda McDonald and everyone involved with MUMs every success in achieving their aim.

17:03

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am absolutely delighted to have been able to bring the motion to debate in the chamber, not simply because it allows us to focus on what I think is a very worthwhile topic, but because it allows me to highlight the work of two of life's true angels—one a Scot, one a Malawian—who seem to have been put on this earth with the predetermined aim of making it an infinitely better place to inhabit.

The first of those people will be acutely embarrassed because, if my eyesight is right, I am pleased to say that Linda McDonald has been able to join us in the public gallery, along with some of the key volunteers who have made her charitable trust, which is best known to all of us as MUMs, work so effectively since it was founded in 2005.

Linda started the charity after seeing photographs of Bottom hospital in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. The photographs clearly showed the filthy, unhygienic conditions in which pregnant mothers were supposed to be able to deliver their babies. It is worth noting that in the UK in 2013 one in every 4,600 women could be expected to die in pregnancy or childbirth; in Malawi in that same year, one in every 36 could expect to die simply because they had become pregnant.

It was no wonder that Linda, who is a practising midwife, was so shocked by the photographs that

she was shown. Every single one of us would have been shocked, but I suspect that very few of us would have thought “Well, that’s enough. I’m going to go and do something about this and try to make a difference.”

So, MUMs was born; the first in a series of recipe books was produced; Jack McConnell, a former First Minister, brought MUMs to the Parliament’s attention; and MUMs became instrumental in raising the £100,000 that saw a new purpose-built maternity unit being built at Bwaila hospital. Once that unit began to operate, the book that previously recorded the daily deaths of babies and the weekly deaths of mothers was barely required any longer. I had the enormous privilege of visiting Bwaila hospital in 2011, and I could only marvel at the charts of infant and mother mortality that had been meticulously kept since the new unit had been built and which proved so vividly that the £100,000 investment had produced a return that could never be calculated in financial terms. It has produced a safe environment in which women can give birth.

MUMs could not and did not stop there. It had well and truly taken root, and over the years it has raised huge amounts of money that has been thoughtfully and carefully targeted at improving the lives of mothers, babies and families in Malawi: feeding stations for under-fives have been set up; nursery teachers funded; drinking water sourced; and basic toilet facilities researched. All that and much more has been achieved by MUMs.

Somewhere along the way, a very fortuitous contact was made with a lady called Charity Salima, the second of the angels I referred to earlier. I visited Charity at her Achikondi clinic in 2011 and again in 2013. I am not sure that I could ever visit Malawi again without visiting Achikondi, which literally means “a caring home”. Both the clinic and the story that led to its establishment are truly inspirational.

Charity Salima was a research nurse working for the Malawi Government. However, she became so appalled by the type of death rates that I referred to earlier and her increased knowledge and experience of the conditions that pregnant women in Lilongwe had to survive that she, like Linda, came to the conclusion that enough was enough.

In 2008, using her own meagre resources and with the backing of the National Organisation of Nurses and Midwives of Malawi, Charity rented a property in District 23 and established her maternity clinic, although I suspect that we would probably not recognise it as such if we happened upon it. That clinic and Charity Salima are now well on their way to delivering their 6,000th baby without having to record a single death of either mother or child in the clinic’s six-year history.

Charity, being Charity, did not stop at that. She also provides antenatal and postnatal care to mothers and babies, runs an under-fives clinic and feeding station, provides HIV testing and runs a family planning advice service—all achieved without any Government funding whatsoever. I can say with total sincerity that Charity Salima is one of the most remarkable human beings that I have ever come across.

Since 2009, MUMs has supported Charity through a monthly donation and, in addition, has funded a badly needed ambulance to increase the catchment area from which pregnant mothers can access that extraordinary place. However, a new challenge has emerged, and it is the one that I want to highlight through this debate.

The owner of the Achikondi clinic has increased the rent. On its own that might have been bearable but, in a particularly unhelpful move, he has begun to build a house just 7 feet from the front wall of the clinic itself, compromising access to the clinic and, more importantly, the privacy that it currently enjoys.

The clinic simply could not continue to operate under those circumstances. In typical Charity style, she has bought a plot of land and, with assistance from the Norwegian Nurses Association, has begun to build a new, purpose-built, 17-bed clinic. However, she has run out of money, which is where the title of my motion—“MUMs’ Last Big Challenge”—comes in.

MUMs is looking to amalgamate with another charity for the most understandable of reasons. Its success has been such that it has become a more than full-time task to administer and the trust has decided that amalgamation would best secure its aims into the future.

However, it has set itself the one final challenge of raising the £15,000 that Charity needs by Christmas. It has produced a donate to charity pack—I have one here and I can get more—that gives all the necessary advice to individuals and organisations to raise just £100 each towards the total. Everyone who does so will be immortalised on a plaque on the wall of the new clinic when it opens.

Through tonight’s debate, I hope that we MSPs can help to do a little to raise awareness of the initiative in our constituencies and regions—I have some of the donate to charity packs with me and, as I said, I can get more. If members are wondering how to dispose of the charitable fee that we are offered for participating in some of the surveys that seem to proliferate at this time of year, I can think of no better cause to donate to.

That aside, my motion gives Parliament the opportunity to say thank you to Linda McDonald and MUMs for the truly remarkable work that they

have undertaken over the years. That work was not done for glory, gain or recognition, but for the simple satisfaction of doing what is right and, in doing so, improving beyond all recognition the lives of so many others who are so much less fortunate than we are. I am privileged to have spoken to the motion in my name.

17:11

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to be able to speak in a debate about Malawi, but this particular one says everything about the relationship between Scotland and Malawi.

As many members know and as Alex Fergusson so eloquently said in his motion—he deserves congratulations for lodging the motion and securing the debate—the child and maternal mortality situation in Malawi has been and still is challenging. When I first visited in 2006, it was shocking to hear that one baby was dying every day and one mother every week, and it was a shocking situation to witness. In some of the hospitals in Malawi, where MUMs and other organisations have been so active, there is now no need to record that kind of information on that kind of scale. Instead the progress of the babies and their mums is being recorded. To know that is quite remarkable. No word could really do it justice; “remarkable” is as good a word as any.

The efforts of MUMs have been particularly inspirational in my view. At the beginning, it sounded like a very small idea to have a book of recipes—some of which I still use to this day; it was a useful book in my home. However, the fact that a book of recipes would be used to raise money for such an important aspect of Malawian life is an interesting concept. It demonstrates that it is the personal contacts and relationships between Scotland and Malawi that help to make such a difference.

As we know, MUMs has contributed large sums to helping mums with delivering their babies and with their postnatal care, and it has given equally large sums of money to help prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission and to help health workers who have become infected through their work. MUMs funds feeding stations and boosts the chances of children who are born in Malawi living full, long and fulfilling lives.

As we have heard, the latest project that MUMs is supporting is the work of Charity Salima—never was someone better named. Her work has been highlighted in a number of ways and it really is significant: the results achieved in her clinic are fantastic. I have not had the opportunity to visit the clinic, but I have read a number of articles and

comments about it. It clearly is making a huge difference for the mums in that part of Malawi.

A few years ago, Tom Pow wrote the book “When the Rains Come”, which was frankly a delight to read. It was a lovely book: it was happy, uplifting and beautifully illustrated. It told the story of an ordinary family in Malawi, although it could have been a family anywhere in Africa, going about their lives and living them to the full. As in any family there was an indomitable grandmother—it was good to see the similarities that came to play there. The book raised significant sums of money and I think that it is still available. It can help the fundraising that Alex Fergusson mentioned.

As I said, the relationship between Scotland and Malawi has been significant. A hallmark of this Parliament has been that we recognised that there was work to be done and we set about doing it. Our and the Government’s efforts have been worth while and important, but over the years the spotlight that this Parliament and the Government has shone on the work and need in Malawi has been most important. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the work that MUMs and Linda McDonald have done since 2005. I very much hope that they raise enough money by Christmas to fulfil their ambition, and I am sure that with the Parliament’s support they will do.

17:17

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I draw the Parliament’s attention to my entry in the register of members’ interests: I am the convener of the Parliament’s cross-party group on Malawi.

I, too, congratulate Alex Fergusson on securing this debate to highlight the work of the charity Malawi Underprivileged Mothers, or MUMs, as we have all come to know it. I commend him for his continuing interest in and enthusiasm for all things related to Malawi.

On our cross-party group visit to Malawi in January 2011, we had to do, among other things, a kind of recce to see which projects Annie Lennox should visit the following month, when Alex Fergusson, in his role as Presiding Officer, would accompany her. Like many others, he was captivated by the warm heart of Africa and the projects that he visited. His commitment continues, hence the motion in his name today. Obviously, he was captivated by MUMs’ work in Malawi.

The latest effort of MUMs and Linda McDonald, the charity’s founder, to build a 17-bed clinic is truly remarkable and commendable. I know how difficult it is to raise money for Malawi, but the fundraising capacity of MUMs is legendary in the

Parliament, as others have mentioned. In 2009, Mary Scanlon held a debate in which Jack McConnell spoke. He distributed the cookbook in the Parliament and badgered us all to contribute to it and buy it. In 2008, Mike Pringle said in a debate:

"I have found that one cannot say no to Linda."—[*Official Report*, 20 February 2008; c 6100.]

I am sure that he meant only in relation to stumping up money and helping the project, rather than anything else.

Malawi is making progress towards meeting the millennium development goals, particularly in relation to reducing poverty, accessing improved sources of water and improving the lives of slum dwellers. However, in relation to infant mortality and maternal health, there is still much to do. Many people, such as Linda McDonald in Scotland, have taken up the challenge.

Patricia Ferguson mentioned some of the problems that people face as they try to reduce child mortality and maternal death. Among those problems are providing a safe environment for birth to take place and ensuring that the mother's health during pregnancy is the best that it can be. It is particularly important to ensure that the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel is as high as possible. While the situation is improving a great deal in urban areas, there is still a bit more to be done in rural areas.

I take this opportunity to mention a project run by the University of Aberdeen's institute of applied health sciences, whose objective is to encourage the integration of rural midwives in the local health system in order to maintain their skills and increase their job satisfaction in local communities.

Although there is still much work to be done, we must commend and support the many people, such as Linda McDonald and those involved in MUMs, who continue to work on the issue in Malawi. It is much appreciated. There is some disconnect in the work of the charities, and the Scotland Malawi Partnership is trying to ensure that they are in tune with the Government of Malawi. Perhaps the minister could take that up, and I look forward to hearing his speech.

17:21

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I join my colleagues in congratulating Alex Fergusson on securing the debate. As others have testified, his commitment to and passionate support for the links between the Parliament and Scotland and Malawi is a matter of record, to the point where he has been prepared to be Annie Lennox's bag carrier, which is above and beyond the call of duty for most Presiding Officers.

Like Patricia Ferguson, Maureen Watt and Alex Fergusson, I have felt very fortunate in being able, in my role as an MSP, to develop my own links with Malawi, often born of the links that community groups, schools and others in my constituency have fostered over the years. A lot of excellent work has been developed, whether in education, health or economic development. MUMs is a project that I was less familiar with. In that sense, today's debate serves a further useful purpose.

Raising awareness is the easy bit. As Alex Fergusson made clear in his opening remarks, the really remarkable work of what he called the "true angels" is the hard stuff. Much has been said about Linda McDonald. If someone can get Mike Pringle to do what they ask, where on earth were they when we needed a Liberal Democrat chief whip in previous parliamentary sessions? The same applies to Charity Salima—she and Linda McDonald do the sort of work that humbles all of us. Alex Fergusson was right to pay eloquent tribute to that.

I was on the same visit to Malawi as Maureen Watt back in 2011. One of the more striking aspects of that trip was our visit to a settlement on the outskirts of Lilongwe to visit a mother who had been diagnosed as HIV positive during a previous visit by a Scottish Parliament delegation. Truth be told, no one really expected her still to be alive in 2011. It was therefore remarkable to see the recovery that she had made. That was evidence that things were coming together and moving in the right direction: there had been investment in education, and the fertiliser programme was ensuring that markets at least had the food that could support the antiretroviral programme.

It is too easy to succumb to a counsel of despair, which is why, as Patricia Ferguson suggested, we should not lose sight of the fact that some projects are delivering real benefits here and now. Although there is still an awful lot to do, that should give us confidence that the interventions that we are making work.

Despite that progress, the figures are bleak. Life expectancy in Malawi is still around 37 years; the maternal death rate is still eight in every 1,000; one child in 10 dies before the age of 10; and every week two nurses die from HIV, which parallels the issue with the attrition rate among teachers, where the number of teachers passing away due to HIV/AIDS is undermining efforts to build capacity in the school sector. The figures are a source of real concern and underscore the need for projects such as MUMs and the work that is done by Linda McDonald, Charity Salima and their colleagues.

The objectives of that work are that Malawi's children should be well nourished and have educational opportunities; that all mothers should

have safe and caring maternity provision; that nurses who have AIDS, who are at risk of contracting AIDS or who are simply concerned about the risk of contracting AIDS should be supported; and that we should ensure that we work closely with local communities to give them the confidence and the capacity to help themselves. We should support all those objectives, and we should raise awareness of the work and encourage others to support it.

Last year, the McArthur family agreed to forego a few presents at Christmas in order to adopt a snow leopard. This year, I can think of no better cause than supporting Linda McDonald and MUMs towards their target of £15,000 to complete their clinic before the end of the year.

Immortalising things on plaques seems to be very much in the zeitgeist of the week but, in conclusion, I congratulate Alex Fergusson on securing the debate and I promise to see him afterwards to settle my debt. I offer my thanks to the “true angels” who are doing so much good work in the warm heart of Africa.

17:26

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): I thank Alex Fergusson for lodging his important motion, and I thank Linda McDonald, Charity Salima and the team at the Achikondi clinic for all the hard and good work that they do.

There is nothing like an impending Government reshuffle to focus the mind on one's portfolio. I can say without any fear or favour that my portfolio is by far the best in the Government, which might be the best-kept secret in Government. The reason is that I get to see examples of the best change in the world and to talk to the people who are bringing it about. MUMs is a good example of that. The charity gives a gift that we cannot put a price on: the gift of life. The gift of a healthy child cannot be quantified.

When we speak about Malawi, we often talk about the historical context. Of course, it is important because it sets the foundation of the relationship that we have in the present and will take forward into the future.

That historical context centres around that amazing Scot, Dr David Livingstone. At heart, he was an explorer, but he was also a medic and a missionary—although he was not particularly good at that, as he converted only one person who, apparently, became a lapsed Christian. He talked about the three Cs: Christianity, commerce and civilisation. I always think that not enough attention is paid to the “civilisation” part. If we read some of his manuscripts, we can see that when he talked about civilisation he was talking about the slave

trade, but also about the idea that humanity was all one, and that we should come together to face global challenges that affect us all, regardless of our race, colour, religion or where we come from. I am delighted that his legacy is being carried on to this day by people like Linda McDonald and people in Malawi, and also by our children. I still keep a close eye on the good work of people such as Martha Payne, the young girl who is helping Mary's Meals to feed young schoolchildren in Malawi.

The point about that historical context is that it helps to inform our present relationship. Last week, I was in Geneva for a couple of days, talking about our international development work. The United Nations was extremely interested in what Scotland is doing and all the officials I spoke to said that although the size of a country's contribution is important, what is equally important is the impact that Scotland is having and the leadership that we are showing. We have a relatively modest international development programme that is worth £9 million a year, of which £3 million is ring fenced for Malawi. However, from that small pot, we support more than 30 projects in the country.

That is unique not because of the top-down relationship, as important as that Government-to-Government relationship is, but because of the bottom-up relationship. The entire civic society of Scotland is involved, from the very north of our country and Mr McArthur's—I was about to call him General MacArthur—constituency of Orkney, where I have met some of those who are involved in the relationship, right down to Selkirk in the Borders, where I have also met people who are involved in the relationship with Malawi.

That relationship covers the country not only geographically but demographically: I have met teachers, students, nurses, professionals and business people who are involved in it. In fact, a study from the Scotland Malawi Partnership showed that 84,000 Scots are involved in the relationship with Malawi. In a country of 5 million people, 84,000 are involved in helping to improve the lives of their fellow men, women and children in Malawi. According to the same survey, 50 per cent of people know somebody who is involved in that relationship and 97 per cent of people think favourably of it. In this time of financial restraint, economic austerity and food banks—difficult times for people—they are still in favour of committing our resources, energy and efforts to improving the lives of people who are far worse off than we are.

As have members who have spoken already in eloquent speeches, I have been to Malawi. It is difficult to understand the realities of abject poverty until we witness it for ourselves and speak to a mother who has had to bury her child because

of malnutrition, or to a child who has been orphaned because his parents have such a low life expectancy, as Liam McArthur said. It is difficult to understand that, in a world of plenty, we have to hear the figures that Patricia Ferguson cited about the mothers who still die simply because they have become pregnant.

It is a great disgrace and shame to us all that, in the 21st century, women have to walk up to 30km in labour and then, through the pain of a fistula, suffer a delayed labour that not only causes their child to be stillborn but causes them internal damage—tissue damage that affects their rectum and bladder and leaves them incontinent. There is no way that they can have another child if that fistula is not repaired. Unfortunately, some of them are divorced because they will not be able to produce children. They are then outcast from entire communities. Imagine that in the 21st century.

Maternal health is incredibly important to the Scottish Government. We fund eight projects in Malawi, including one in Bwaila hospital in Lilongwe. I visited the fistula care centre in Bwaila hospital, where Linda McDonald, Charity Salima and the team work. Working with Ann Gloag's Freedom from Fistula Foundation, I got to see how women who suffered from fistulas and various pregnancy complications got their lives back by being given a solar battery that they could charge other people from their village or town to use, which allowed them make an income for themselves and, therefore, to go from being outcasts to being business leaders in their communities.

I note and commend the range of good work that is done by MUMs, from antenatal and postnatal care, through HIV testing, to family planning advice, which is simple but also incredibly important. I hope that individuals and organisations will dig deep to support them.

We have heard much about Linda McDonald's personal drive. If I can catch up with her after the debate, I look forward to saying a quick hello. From everything that I hear, she sounds like a phenomenal fundraiser. She should be quite careful, because a political party might snap her up if she continues with such a record.

Charity Salima is rightly described as a miracle nurse. Her clinic has delivered thousands of babies and there has not been one death since 2008.

I agree entirely with Alex Fergusson's description of those two women as angels. Every member of the Parliament should determine what they can do to help MUMs. I will be happy to do that. Through the work that they do with MUMs,

those two women and their team helped to re-establish my faith in humanity in a difficult world.

The greatness of a nation is not measured by its economic wealth or its military might, but by how it treats the most vulnerable in its society. In the globalised world in which we live, we can demonstrate our greatness through the work that is done by MUMs and the many other charities and good people that help to improve the lives of the least fortunate and the most vulnerable on our planet.

Meeting closed at 17:35.

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