



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 18 February 2015

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance, Constitution and Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions. In order to get as many people in as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions and answers.

Economy (Central Scotland)

1. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to boost the economy in Central Scotland. (S4O-04001)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to boosting economic growth and tackling inequality across Scotland. In Central Scotland, we continue to support economic growth with substantial infrastructure investment and help for businesses, enabling them to grow and create employment. Businesses across Central Scotland have benefited from £53 million of regional selective assistance since 2007, creating and safeguarding 7,000 jobs. Almost 2,000 employment opportunities have been created for young people through the youth employment Scotland fund, and a further 145 jobs have been created through £7.5 million of support from the Scottish Government's regeneration capital grant fund.

Margaret McCulloch: The Government will be aware of my concerns about the decline of the manufacturing base in East Kilbride and about the impact that the withdrawal of Rolls Royce from the town later this year could have on the wider economy of the region. Could the minister therefore update me on the Scottish Government's involvement with the multi-agency East Kilbride task force and explain how it and its partners are promoting the town as a destination for inward investment?

John Swinney: I assure Margaret McCulloch that the Government entirely supports the sentiments that she has expressed about the importance of manufacturing industry for Scotland and particularly for towns such as East Kilbride that have a strong track record in the field of manufacturing. The Government participates in

the East Kilbride task force, which is run by the local authority, through our partners Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland, and through the wider input of organisations that the Government substantially funds, such as South Lanarkshire College.

The focus of the task force is on finding opportunities to deal with the circumstances that Margaret McCulloch raised in relation to the transfer of Rolls Royce's activities from East Kilbride to Renfrewshire. The Government is also keen to use devices available through the work of Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International to promote East Kilbride as a destination for inward investment and to support the company base of East Kilbride to expand those companies' international business activities, and Scottish Development International would be keen to support companies with growth prospects in that respect.

Tesco (Closures)

2. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Tesco regarding recent closure announcements. (S4O-04002)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): This is a worrying time for all those affected by the Tesco announcement about the closure of four stores in Scotland, including the superstore in Kirkcaldy, with 189 employees. In a joint initiative with the leader of Fife Council, I wrote to the chief executive of Tesco offering assistance as part of efforts to reverse the situation. Scottish Government officials and Fife Council met Tesco representatives on 2 February to discuss the issues faced by the company and to express our concern about the effects that the closures would have on communities, employees and their families. In addition, officials in the Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland have been in contact with Tesco to offer support through our partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—initiative for any employees who may be facing redundancy.

Liz Smith: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and for his written response to my parliamentary question, which I received yesterday. The recent round of Tesco closures and non-openings accounts for a 16 per cent share of the United Kingdom closures and non-openings, which is obviously disproportionate, as we have 8.5 per cent of the population share. Given that, can the cabinet secretary give a categorical assurance that there will be no successor tax to the public health supplement, which the Scottish Government was forced to

abandon because it would make the retail sector, which is so important in this country, uncompetitive?

John Swinney: The first thing to say is that the Government actively supports the retail sector in taking forward its developments. We enjoy good and constructive discussions with the Scottish Retail Consortium, which does a lot of good work in advancing the interests of the retail sector in Scotland. Secondly, as a matter of record, I was not forced to abandon the public health supplement. I said that it would be in place for three years and it was in place for three years, and it came to an end when I said that it would come to an end, just as I predicted.

As I am sure that Liz Smith is aware, as she is an assiduous follower of my every word, there are no provisions in the Government's financial plans to introduce such a supplement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Margaret McCulloch, another assiduous follower.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): In recent times, we have seen, on one hand, a reaction against Tesco towns and, on the other, a community coming together to save an anchor store in their town centre. However, does the minister agree that we should all be concerned about reports at the weekend about redundancies potentially rising to 10,000, and that averting further job losses must be a priority in discussions with Tesco?

John Swinney: We cannot disguise the fact that the retail sector and the major employment that is underpinned by Tesco and other supermarket chains is significant in the Scottish economy. In Kirkcaldy, 189 job losses may well arise from the closure of the store there, which represents a significant loss of employment in one particular community. The job losses in Troon, which will be known to the Presiding Officer, and in Edinburgh and Grangemouth are not as great but they are significant in their localities.

I give Margaret McCulloch the assurance that, on every occasion on which we have faced difficulties around employment loss in different parts of the country, as we do from time to time, the work of the PACE service, which Mr Ewing has led and which has been the subject of debate in Parliament, has been focused entirely on ensuring that we can maximise the employment opportunities for individuals who are adversely affected by the decisions.

Economy (Falkirk)

3. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to boost the economy in the Falkirk Council area. (S40-04003)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to growing the Falkirk economy and creating employment opportunities by working closely with our delivery partners, including Falkirk Council.

Our commitment to boosting the economy was demonstrated by our approval of Falkirk Council's £67 million Grangemouth tax incremental financing project, which is expected to lever in £413 million in private investment, creating almost 6,000 jobs and hundreds of apprenticeships.

Angus MacDonald: I welcome the initiatives that are already under way, especially the Grangemouth TIF, which will give a major boost to, and allow exciting opportunities in, the industrial sector in Grangemouth. However, Grangemouth is also a residential community and, with the recently announced closure of the Tesco metro and Mathieson's Bakery in the town, residents are concerned about the reduction in footfall in the town centre. Will the cabinet secretary continue to work with Falkirk Council to ensure that there is a bright future not only for the industrial sector in Grangemouth but also for the 18,000 residents, who require a vibrant town centre?

John Swinney: I appreciate the point that Mr MacDonald raises. He raises an important question about the future and the vitality of town centres, which is an important consideration for the Government in respect of not only the much larger towns in the locality, such as Falkirk, but the smaller towns, such as Grangemouth.

The town centre action plan sets out a range of actions to help town centres to remain or become vibrant. Those include expanding fresh start rates relief for small businesses, increasing opportunities for town-centre living and agreeing the town centre first principle as part of our wider discussions on this question.

I would also say to Mr MacDonald that the Government works with Falkirk Council in the economic partnership, which will meet this Friday to consider its economic strategy and vision for Grangemouth, which will help in this respect.

Finally, I want to say that Falkirk is a good example of a community that has faced significant changes in its economic base and has responded to them with tremendous courage and vision. Indeed, the combination of visitor attractions in Falkirk—the Kelpies, the Falkirk wheel and the Helix programme—is an example to us all of how real creativity and vision can be used to improve the economic fortunes of the people of our country.

Decommissioning Oil and Gas Facilities (Dundee)

4. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Dundee City Council, Scottish Enterprise, Forth Ports and Decom North Sea about the opportunities in Dundee for decommissioning oil and gas facilities. (S4O-04004)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): We engage regularly with relevant parties on the opportunities that decommissioning provides. However, to maximise economic recovery from oil and gas fields, it is necessary that the United Kingdom Government acts to reinstate investor confidence.

It is also necessary to avoid the premature decommissioning of installations that serve fields that still have a viable life of further oil and gas production. To avoid such premature decommissioning, it is essential that the UK Government delivers in its March budget a package comprising substantial tax reduction measures along the lines of the package that I outlined to Parliament on 8 January this year.

Jenny Marra: That is an interesting answer, because nobody is suggesting the premature decommissioning of any facilities. Indeed, my question was not about what the UK Government was doing but about the Scottish Government.

The last time that I raised the issue, the minister told me that he had published his decommissioning strategy. He will be aware that Dundee City Council and his Scottish National Party colleagues there are engaging on the issue. Will he accept my invitation to come with me to Dundee to meet all four of the parties that I suggested in my question to determine how he can help to facilitate their really getting opportunities from that multibillion pound industrial opportunity in Scotland?

Fergus Ewing: It is generous of Ms Marra to extend the invitation, but I have already had the opportunity to engage with Councillor Ken Guild, Stan Ure, Charles Hammond of Forth Ports and Scottish Enterprise staff and to have discussions with them.

We published in October 2014 the strategy "Decommissioning in the North Sea: Review of Decommissioning Capacity". It is plain that there are significant opportunities, as has been stated, but if Jenny Marra seriously believes that there is no risk of premature decommissioning of North Sea installations, I am afraid that she is sadly mistaken, because that is precisely the risk that Oil & Gas UK has been warning the UK Government about.

Unless there is an appropriate and substantial tax reduction, a substantial number of the more than 400 existing installations in the North Sea face precisely that fate because of their ageing nature and the relatively small but still economically viable deposits of oil and gas that remain. I am hopeful that the UK Government will heed the more informed voice of Oil & Gas UK and other commentators in that regard when it makes its budget announcement in March.

Fiscal Regime (Oil and Gas)

5. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I have a great fear of premature decommissioning.

To ask the Scottish Government, in the light of the financial impact on the industry in Scotland, what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the oil and gas fiscal regime. (S4O-04005)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I attended, as I always do, the UK Government PILOT meeting on 13 January. It was chaired by Matt Hancock, who is the current UK minister with responsibility for oil and gas. At that meeting, I summarised the Scottish Government proposals that were set out in Parliament on 8 January. I commend them to the UK Government and to our colleagues who represent the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties in the Scottish Parliament.

Kevin Stewart: Following the introduction of an exploration tax credit in Norway, the number of exploration wells being drilled increased substantially. Will the minister advise us whether the UK Government has indicated whether it will follow Norway's example and introduce an exploration tax credit to boost our oil and gas industry and protect jobs?

Fergus Ewing: The UK Government has not shared with us its tax proposals in the budget. To be fair to the UK Government, at the PILOT meeting the Treasury civil servant indicated that consideration is being given to introducing measures that might encourage exploration. The question is whether they will be sufficient.

Kevin Stewart pointed to Norway. In 2005, it introduced an exploration tax credit of 78 per cent. Since then, drilling has increased fourfold and the Norwegians have discovered two enormous fields, including the Johan Sverdrup field. The arithmetic is simple: exploration companies can do four drillings in the Norwegian North Sea for the cost of one exploration drilling in the UK sector. That cannot be right and that is why we have called on the UK Government to adopt the Norwegian model.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): On financial impact, the Scottish Government statistics that

were released today on public sector revenues show that for the last quarter of 2014, there was a 55 per cent drop in Scotland's revenue share of North Sea oil. That was before the price of oil dropped below \$50 a barrel. Can the minister advise how much that means in money terms to the Scottish budget, and does he agree that the Barnett bonus is in this case clearly preferable to full fiscal autonomy, so that we are not exposed to there being billions of pounds less revenue for public services due to the drop in oil prices?

Fergus Ewing: No. However, I can inform Parliament that as per the proposals that I announced on 8 January, and according to the analysis that was carried out by Professor Alex Kemp of the University of Aberdeen, who is possibly the most respected academic commentator on this topic in the UK, an investment allowance could support between 14,000 and 26,000 jobs a year across the UK—

Jackie Baillie: That was not my question.

Fergus Ewing: —and the reduction in the supplementary charge could support up to 5,600 jobs per annum across the UK. Those are the realities of the matter. [*Interruption.*] We are having a running commentary from Labour members that is as relevant as Jackie Baillie's question was. The answer is this—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Fergus Ewing: The amount of tax revenue in the future will be substantially determined by whether the tax measures that the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduces in March are sufficient to restore investor confidence. Maximised recovery can happen only if there is investment, and investor confidence will happen only if the tax reductions are sufficient to do that and to show that the UK has learned the lessons of the several tax hikes that were delivered by Labour in 2002 and 2005, and by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in 2011.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Will the minister publish a new "Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin" with updated revenue projections?

Fergus Ewing: Until such time as we know what the tax measures are going to be, it is impossible to speculate on what the revenues will be, because it is impossible to know what the investment will be. I have conducted between 10 and 15 private visits to operators in the past several weeks, mostly in Aberdeen. At one of those visits, one operator outlined precisely, to the nearest million pounds, the reduced investment—it is between £500 million and £1 billion—in the UK continental shelf as a direct result of the hike to the supplementary charge in 2011. That is why we must wait and see what the tax deal is before we speculate about what the tax revenue might be.

Economy (West Scotland)

6. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve the economy in the West Scotland region. (S4O-04006)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth across Scotland, including in West Scotland, through infrastructure investment and through ensuring effective business support.

West Scotland businesses benefit from business support that is delivered by our enterprise agencies and local authorities. In the past year, there have been 17 regional selective assistance awards, which have been worth more than £8.5 million and which have created or safeguarded 1,109 jobs. More than 350 jobs will be created through the recent awards from the Scottish Government's regeneration capital grant fund.

Neil Bibby: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. He will be aware that the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism recently rejected Renfrewshire Council's proposal that an additional enterprise area theme based around creative and cultural industries be established, and that Paisley town centre be identified as the first enterprise zone with that theme. An enterprise zone in Paisley town centre would build on the existing creative and cultural strengths of Paisley and would be a welcome boost to the area in creating jobs. I therefore ask the cabinet secretary whether he will reconsider his Government's decision to reject the council's proposal—a proposal that would help to revitalise Paisley town centre and the local economy.

John Swinney: Neil Bibby will be aware that the Government set out its proposals on enterprise areas some years ago. We set out that we would develop a limited number of enterprise areas and that we would also take forward other inventive mechanisms to encourage investment, including the tax incremental finance project that I discussed with Mr MacDonald a few moments ago. The Government has responded to aspirations in communities in a range of ways in order to deliver a stronger economic future.

The logic is that we cannot have enterprise areas in every part of the country because if we do, they will lose their value in trying to tackle particular issues. I can say to Neil Bibby that one of the enterprise areas is in Ayrshire. It is focused on the life sciences sector and is bringing great rewards to the Ayrshire economy, which is a very severely challenged economy.

The final point that I will make is that, of course, right across the country we provide direct support, principally through measures including the small business bonus scheme, which will substantially help companies in areas in Renfrewshire. It is estimated that 2,475 business premises are paying either zero or reduced rates under the Government's small business bonus scheme, which is directly beneficial to the local economy in Renfrewshire.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask everyone again for brief questions and answers, please.

Funding (Projects)

7. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it allocates money from the budget to capital grant funding for projects. (S4O-04007)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The spending review establishes the overarching spending priorities for the Government, while the infrastructure investment plan sets out priorities for investment and the long-term strategy for the development of public works in Scotland. The annual draft budget statement gives effect to those strategic spending plans and reflects progress as measured by the Scotland performs framework and the on-going process of debate, engagement and consultation on key areas of Government policy. The draft budget is then subject to a number of months of consultation and scrutiny.

Individual portfolios, public bodies, local authorities and other spending bodies are best placed to determine project-by-project capital grant allocations within the strategic framework.

James Kelly: Will the cabinet secretary examine how capital grant funding commitments could bridge spending review periods? That would allow match funding to be introduced in projects such as the University of the West of Scotland's Lanarkshire campus in Hamilton. If progress could be made on that project, it would bring undoubted benefits, not only to the area itself, but also to the Lanarkshire economy and the wider Scottish economy.

John Swinney: There is in what Mr Kelly says a substantial point about long-term planning for capital projects, with which I have absolutely no disagreement at all.

The issue is this: for the period in which we are now, the Government has financial data that will provide us with clarity about our capital and resource budgets until March 2016. We have been able to offer a longer-term period of certainty because we have had financial information about the current period since the commencement of the

financial year 2011-12. So, by and large, we have had about three years of programme funding to enable us to undertake such funding activity.

On the capital programme, what I said to Mr Kelly in my original answer was that the priorities of the infrastructure investment plan structure our decisions about what projects will be supported. That, essentially, pre-commits spending reviews through recognising that some projects take longer than one year to build; they almost always do.

Where we can set out longer-term financial projections, the Government will do so, but I hope that Mr Kelly understands that my ability to do that at this moment is restricted by the fact that I do not have any sight of our financial allocations beyond March 2016.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Will the finance secretary clarify the capital funding for the Anderson high school in Lerwick, which has been subject to uncertainty that has been caused by the change, from last September, to European Union rules with regard to the Scottish Futures Trust? Is he in a position to outline to me—possibly not today but at some point in the near future—when the timescale for funding on that project will be clarified, given that financial closure was due to be completed in the next couple of months?

John Swinney: I am very happy to brief Mr Scott on all the issues with which we are wrestling. His command of that matter is substantial already, but if he wishes to learn more about it, I will be delighted to share ever more detail with him.

We are trying to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. There has been a change to the European statistical accounts, which flows through into the United Kingdom's accounts and then into the budgeting commitments that the Scottish Government is able to make.

I categorically assure Mr Scott that the resources are in place to support Anderson high school. The issue that we have to address is how the statistical analysis is concluded, and that work is under way. I have already shared with Parliament information on the work that we are undertaking, and I commit to updating Parliament on the question in due course. If Mr Scott would welcome further information, I would be delighted to provide it for him.

Feed-in Tariff

8. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government regarding the feed-in tariff for hydroelectricity schemes. (S4O-04008)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Since June 2013, I and

my officials have raised our concerns that the feed-in tariff scheme for hydro power is defective. We have done so on seven separate occasions, but the UK Government has refused to agree to make amendments to the scheme.

Nigel Don: I thank the minister for that response, although obviously not for its content. Is there a risk that, if amendments are not made, Scottish industry will lose out?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, there is. We have a proud record of hydro schemes, with 1.5GW of capacity, which is nearly 90 per cent of total UK hydro capacity. Since 2007, we have consented to 19 hydro applications and to a further two pumped-storage hydro applications. The investment is worth more than £13.8 million to Scotland.

The flaw in the FIT mechanism has led to industry expressing to the UK Government its concerns that there is a real risk that, after the delivery of a glut of hydro developments in order to beat the next depression—it will possibly be a reduction of 20 per cent—there will be a massive curtailment of further investment. That is the worry. I have been unable to persuade the UK Government to amend the scheme, although we have had courteous discussions and it understands the problem. I am hopeful that a planned review in 2015 will, however, let sense prevail and will correct what I believe is not a political issue but a technical defect.

Tourism VAT

9. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the cut tourism VAT campaign. (S4O-04009)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): VAT is a reserved matter, but the Scottish Government recognises the case made by the cut tourism VAT campaign and has long highlighted the current disparity in the high VAT rates that are levied by the United Kingdom Government when compared with the rates of our European competitors. Tourism remains a vital part of Scotland's economy, and the Government is committed to driving growth in the sector, including by minimising factors that have a negative effect on Scottish tourism competitiveness.

Graeme Dey: Can the minister advise me of any evidence from elsewhere in Europe that might support the growing clamour from all sectors of the industry, not to mention 100 plus members of Parliament, for the UK Government to act in the best interests of tourism across these islands and cut the VAT rate to allow the industry to compete on a level playing field with the rest of the continent?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I can share such evidence, as it happens. Of the 28 European Union countries, 25 enjoy reduced tourism VAT, with Lithuania amending its rates this year. In fact, only Denmark and Slovenia have higher VAT rates than the UK, where the rate is 20 per cent. In particular, Ireland reduced VAT on tourism from 13.5 to 9 per cent in May 2011. That was supposed to be temporary, but it remains in place now because of the benefits that Ireland has enjoyed as a result.

Opencast Mining

10. Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress since the most recent meeting of the opencast mining task force. (S4O-04010)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The group has made progress on both its main objectives, which are securing re-employment and progressing restoration work. The Scottish Government has urged the United Kingdom Government to give positive consideration to a proposal from industry that would enable further progress on restoration.

Clare Adamson: Will the minister update us on efforts to deliver a scheme that will extend the rebate from the carbon levy, which currently applies only to slurry, to coal mine restoration?

Fergus Ewing: I have been working closely with Ian Cockburn of Hargreaves, the author of the proposals, who I understand has had constructive discussions with HM Treasury, and I have had telephone discussions with Matt Hancock and David Mundell. At a fortuitous and accidental encounter with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on Granton High Street on Saturday, where coincidentally we both happened to be campaigning in connection with another event, I took the opportunity to lobby him on the matter.

I believe that there is an element of cross-party support from parties across the chamber—not the Green Party, which is absent, but possibly all other parties. I very much believe that the proposal offers the real possibility of making very substantial progress on tackling the restoration problem of the opencast mines that have been coaled out in Scotland.

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I welcome the progress that is being made, and I support the principle of the Cockburn plan. I am delighted that last month Fife Council put a paper through its executive. I have lodged a motion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you come to the question, please?

Alex Rowley: —to get a debate in this place. Will the minister support that motion and support having a debate here on how we move forward?

Fergus Ewing: I believe that ministers are not allowed to support or sign motions, so for that reason only I will not support it.

Seriously, however, Alex Rowley makes the point well. There is cross-party support for the proposal, which would allow almost all of the restoration tasks that Scotland faces to be done. It would involve extending the exemption for slurry to restoration coal. It has considerable support within the industry and comes at a time when the coal price has fallen further, which has led to serious questions as to whether there will be further redundancies in the sector unless the proposal is enacted.

I am working with David Mundell, Matt Hancock, Danny Alexander, Alex Rowley and Murdo Fraser, who is not here, to see whether there can be a cross-party approach so that the proposal can be implemented swiftly. Otherwise, I fear that time may well be agin us.

Leuchars (Royal Air Force)

11. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will assist businesses in Leuchars following the departure of the RAF. (S4O-04011)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government disagreed strongly with the United Kingdom Government's decision to reduce the number of RAF bases in Scotland from three to one and with its decision to end the role of Leuchars as an RAF main operating base. This Government, together with its partners, including Fife Council, is working to assist businesses across Fife with investment and support to help them thrive.

Roderick Campbell: The minister may be aware that some businesses in Leuchars are experiencing very significant drops in trade following the departure of two RAF squadrons last year and before the arrival of the Army later this year. It is my understanding that, despite requests, the UK Government has not been forthcoming in providing any financial assistance to date. Will the minister agree to come to Leuchars to discuss matters with the business community?

Fergus Ewing: Yes. I received an invitation from Roderick Campbell, which I am happy to accept, and earlier today I had the opportunity to have a discussion with the deputy leader of Fife Council, Councillor Lesley Laird. I look forward to meeting and discussing the matters with her colleagues, on a cross-party, non-partisan basis.

The Ministry of Defence has a responsibility to communities when it pulls out of them, and I hope that it will discharge those responsibilities. People believe that the MOD has a very clear moral responsibility, which it must obtemper, and I will continue to work with Roderick Campbell and colleagues across other parties in the chamber to persuade it to do so. We will do everything that we can to assist businesses and individuals that may be affected by the decisions that the MOD has taken.

Smith Commission (Income Tax)

12. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the income tax powers recommended by the Smith commission can be implemented. (S4O-04012)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Smith commission recommendations on income tax powers and the United Kingdom Government's response make it clear that income tax will be a shared tax that will continue to apply on a UK-wide basis. As such, the implementation of the Smith commission's recommendations on income tax powers is largely a matter for the UK Government.

George Adam: Does the cabinet secretary agree that without full control over Scotland's finances, and with only the limited powers that are on offer, this Parliament will always have difficulty in trying to make the type of life-changing decisions needed for the betterment of the people of Scotland?

John Swinney: There is a substantive point that relates to the fact that some of the measures that Parliament may wish to take forward require changes to the United Kingdom tax and benefit system to enable them to have real value for the families affected. Earlier today, I happened to have a conversation with some external stakeholders about childcare, and some of the proposals that they made would require those changes to happen. That illustrates the point that Mr Adam makes: it is only when we have the full and combined integration of those responsibilities that we can take some of the transformative decisions that our country requires.

Crown Estate (Devolution)

13. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in devolving the powers of the Crown Estate. (S4O-04013)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Smith commission recommendations are clear that

responsibility for management of the Crown Estate's economic assets out to 200 nautical miles in Scotland should be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. Once the Crown Estate has been devolved, we plan to develop a new framework for the management of those assets and the associated income.

We are continuing discussions with the Crown Estate and the UK Government to ensure that the draft clauses on the Crown Estate properly implement the Smith commission recommendations. In parallel, we will bring together stakeholders in the early stage of the development of a new framework for the management of Crown Estate assets in Scotland.

Rob Gibson: Coastal communities have asked whether the proceeds of offshore renewables and of associated cables and pipelines at more than 12 miles offshore will attract revenues for their use. Is it the cabinet secretary's intention to ensure that coastal communities will be able to access revenue from the proceeds of offshore renewables, including those relating to items at more than 12 miles offshore?

John Swinney: The Smith commission recommendations will enable us to ensure that island and coastal local authorities receive 100 per cent of net revenues generated from Scottish territorial waters adjacent to their coast. The arrangements for distributing income generated from the Crown Estate rights more than 12 miles offshore will be developed in Scotland by Parliament, with input from stakeholders, once the powers are devolved.

I can assure Mr Gibson that there will be full and extensive consultation with coastal communities in that process.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief, Ms Scanlon.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Some tenant farmers on the Crown Estate in Moray are concerned that their voices will not be heard during the consultation process moving towards more devolution of powers from the Crown Estate. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that within Moray the rural portfolio, the tenant farmers and local stakeholders will be involved in the process?

John Swinney: Mary Scanlon makes an important point. The debate about the Crown Estate often considers only the offshore activities, and there are, of course, many onshore interests of the Crown Estate. It is essential that every one of those interested parties has the opportunity to participate in the consultation. I give her an assurance that that will be the case.

Fife Council (Funding)

14. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what additional funding it has allocated to Fife Council to protect services. (S4O-04014)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is providing Fife Council with a total revenue funding allocation of £683.1 million in 2015-16, which represents a like-with-like increase of over £3.5 million compared with the council's funding for the current year. In addition, Fife Council will receive a capital grant allocation of £42.1 million next year, which represents an increase of £3.8 million compared with this year.

David Torrance: Has the leader of Fife Council signed up to an agreement to protect teacher numbers through additional funding that will be made available by the Scottish Government?

John Swinney: The Government has made it clear to local authority leaders that we require their response to the proposals that we set out in the budget in Parliament earlier this month by this coming Friday. I look forward to receiving confirmation to that effect from local authorities around the country.

Economy (Inverness and Nairn)

15. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to boost the economy around Inverness and Nairn. (S4O-04015)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government has invested heavily in health, education and connectivity in the Highlands and Islands. Specific examples include the £30 million design contract for the A96 Inverness to Aberdeen dualling programme, including the Nairn bypass, and the £30 million investment by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in Inverness campus. That investment complements work being taken forward across the region to deliver sustainable economic growth.

David Stewart: Does the cabinet secretary share my view that transport infrastructure projects are vital drivers in stimulating the local economy? I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to dualling the A96 between Inverness and Nairn, but I believe that it is crucial that rail on the neighbouring Inverness to Aberdeen line is dualled as well. Does the cabinet secretary agree?

John Swinney: A number of developments are under way to support the upgrade of the Inverness to Aberdeen rail link, which is an important

connection that will form part of the Government's investment programme. We announced £170 million of investment in March 2014 in the Inverness to Aberdeen railway, which will fund improvements to increase the number of trains, improve signalling, lay infrastructure for new stations and enhance timetable services.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Thank you. That ends question time.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I appreciate that you were not in the chair for question time, but I seek your advice regarding who determines whether a question is irrelevant and whether it is the Presiding Officers or, indeed, the ministers. During question time we heard from Fergus Ewing, who determined that a supplementary question was not relevant. That was not ruled as being out of order by Deputy Presiding Officer John Scott.

The Presiding Officer: As Mrs Scanlon knows, because I have said it many times before, I am not responsible for the answers that come from ministers or anybody else.

National Health Service

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12325, in the name of Jenny Marra, on protecting Scotland's communities.

14:41

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I start by publicly thanking our national health service staff up and down the country for the service that they give and the care that they deliver to our patients and families. So many of the stories that I hear from our health service talk of the compassion and generosity of NHS staff in the care that they give our loved ones every day. The NHS is our most important public service; it is owned by us and delivered through the caring hands of NHS workers.

It is in the interests of all those staff, the patients and every citizen in Scotland that the Labour Party has brought a motion to Parliament today to lift the veil of secrecy around our NHS in Scotland, for confident, fearless and robust institutions have no fear of openness, transparency and accountability.

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

Jenny Marra: I ask Mr McDonald to allow me to make a little progress.

Institutions that are open to change and improving their services want the public to know what service they are delivering and how they are measuring up to expectations. Of all the NHS staff I have spoken to, none has feared or dreaded openness and transparency. That is why the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport's U-turn on publishing statistics is welcome but, at the same time, baffling, for only two weeks ago today she stood up in the chamber and told me that publishing accident and emergency statistics on a weekly basis was political interference.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: I will take an intervention in a minute.

The cabinet secretary asked whether I was suggesting that she should politically interfere with the publication of statistics. If she would like to tell me whether she still feels that the publication of statistics is political interference, I am happy to take the intervention.

Shona Robison: First, it is the chief statistician who has decided to release the statistics on a

weekly basis, which of course I welcome. [Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Shona Robison: On political interference, will Jenny Marra take the opportunity—she refused to do so this morning—to apologise to the staff of the NHS after her political manipulation of statistics? If she cares about the staff in the NHS, she should apologise to them for that gross misrepresentation of the hard work that they do. Please apologise.

Jenny Marra: So the chief statistician decides to publish on a three-monthly basis and then on a one-monthly basis but, after pressure from the Scottish Labour Party, the chief statistician decides to publish on a weekly basis. If the cabinet secretary is saying that she had nothing to do with that decision, I suggest that she is not in control of what is going on in her health department.

Less than 24 hours after Shona Robison made her statement on political interference, the First Minister stood up and told us at First Minister's question time that her civil servants had started to look into the publication of weekly statistics. I must therefore ask whether the health secretary was aware on 4 February that the Government's policy on publishing A and E statistics was changing.

It is hard to believe that, if Shona Robison had instructed her civil servants to look at publishing the data, she would come to the chamber and forcefully say that such a policy was political interference. Perhaps she did not know what was going on in her department on 4 February. Is it the case that the decision to publish A and E statistics was not hers but the First Minister's and that decisions are being taken on health that Shona Robison knows nothing about and has no control whatsoever over? The health secretary's statements strongly suggest that she is not in control of decisions on health and that the First Minister is intervening, where necessary, to clean up the mess.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: I will give way later.

Just yesterday, Shona Robison had to apologise to more than 800 people who have had their operations cancelled since the new year.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: No—I have taken an intervention already. [Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, Ms Marra is not giving way.

Jenny Marra: Let us be in no doubt about how bad the situation is. Since the new year, NHS Tayside has had to cancel more than double the number of operations that it cancelled in the whole

of the past financial year. The number of cancelled operations is increasing exponentially across the country as a result of the pressures on our health service.

We come to the chamber with one of our wishes granted. It is becoming quite easy to get the Government to move, because no sooner was our motion calling for the publication of statistics laid than the health secretary—or the First Minister; who knows?—decided that a new website would be launched to give the public the information that they need on A and E waiting times, with information on cancelled operations to follow in the coming months. I ask the cabinet secretary to explain the delay in publishing the figures for cancelled operations, given that *The Herald* was able to publish them on Monday.

We will have a new website with information on our health service for the public. That is welcome; it is a great idea. Which aspect of Labour's five-point plan for the NHS will the cabinet secretary, or the First Minister, adopt next? Point 1 of our plan calls for a review of acute beds. That would be welcome, too. Since 2007, the Scottish National Party has cut beds by nearly 1,200.

Point 2 calls for mandatory annual cleanliness and safety inspections for A and E wards. My colleague Alex Rowley will talk in more detail about the shocking report, which was published last week, on the state of the A and E department at the Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy. I know that the health secretary will be as concerned as I am that beds, chairs and trolleys in that hospital have been contaminated with blood. Does she, or the First Minister, have a plan to address that?

Under point 3, as the health secretary will have heard at the weekend, Scottish Labour would introduce modern-day matrons in A and E to ease pressure and ensure the highest standards of cleanliness.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: No.

Point 4 is about sharing best practice. The health secretary knows as well as I do that our local A and E department in Dundee not only hits but goes beyond its targets. How can its arrangements be shared across the country?

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: I want to make progress.

How can areas of excellence help areas of weakness to improve? What will the health secretary do to make that happen?

Point 5 calls for a website. The SNP has adopted that point, which is welcome.

Yesterday, we heard that we are to have the most transparent health service in the world.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): In the interests of transparency, will Jenny Marra give way?

Jenny Marra: No—I want to make progress.

That is a high bar. I will be interested to hear from the cabinet secretary how that will be achieved and what her ambitions are. To have the most transparent health service in the world will not simply be a matter of publishing A and E waiting times. Patients will—rightly—have a higher expectation of the information and of their health service.

What is the patient's whole journey time to be from lifting the phone to make an appointment with their GP to discharge from hospital? Will the Scottish Government begin to measure and improve that? On each stage of that journey, there are expectations, and sometimes there are delays, stresses and surprises. Can the process be managed better? Will the Government be open about each stage, how long it should take and what patients' expectations will be? Will the duplicity of social unavailability hidden in waiting times end?

Bruce Crawford: Does Jenny Marra not think that it is duplicitous that Jim Murphy has been caught red-handed fiddling NHS figures? Is it not time for the Labour Party to apologise? In particular, is it not time for Jenny Marra to apologise, which she singularly refused to do earlier today?

Jenny Marra: I am not sure whether Bruce Crawford's microphone was on—I could not hear exactly what he said, although I think that I got the gist. Neither any political party nor the British Medical Association would have had to resort to putting in freedom of information requests if the Scottish Government had been open and transparent about the information that it publishes, instead of having to take a lead from David Cameron and have us put pressure on it to publish statistics more frequently.

Mark McDonald: I suspect that the differences between the Labour Party and the BMA are that, first, the BMA would not have fiddled the statistics and, secondly, the BMA would have had the good grace to apologise if it had misinterpreted the statistics, which the Labour Party has failed to do. I put the question for the third time: will Jenny Marra apologise to the hard-working staff in the NHS for the way in which the Labour Party has used the statistics to run down our health service?

Jenny Marra: As I told Mark McDonald last night, no one would have had to resort to putting in

freedom of information requests if the Government had been open and transparent in the first place.

The health secretary must look at the duplicity of social unavailability hidden in waiting times. I expect that the new period of transparency that she has announced will bring that to an end. I hope that she will address that.

If Scotland is to have the most transparent health service in the world, does the Scottish Government plan to match the transparency of the Scottish Ambulance Service, which updates its performance figures on its website every 15 minutes?

We have not yet heard whether the cabinet secretary intends to publish figures on delayed discharge, the tackling of which she has called her greatest priority, and which we agree is the biggest challenge in our health service. I am surprised that she has not included delayed discharge figures in the transparency project, but she might be able to clear that up.

When the cabinet secretary publishes the figures, will she do so with the same openness and accountability as the Scottish Ambulance Service is demonstrating? Will we be able to find out, hour by hour, how many patients have been discharged, how many beds are occupied and how many are unoccupied? Will we be able to find out how the patient flow through our hospitals is operating throughout the day and on each day of the week? That might sound fanciful but, if we take the aspiration of full openness and accountability to its logical conclusion, it makes absolute sense and should be exactly what we are aspiring to in our most important public service in Scotland.

An international report published by McKinsey has concluded that transparency is one of the most powerful drivers of healthcare improvement. It cites as a powerful example the publication of data on Canadian hospitals. Within a few months of the data's release, the average length of stay decreased by more than 30 per cent, and the number of unexpected readmissions declined by more than 20 per cent. If data publication could have a similar effect on delayed discharges in Scotland, what a radical improvement that would be.

A study published by *The New England Journal of Medicine* has shown that public data reporting is as effective an incentive as financial rewards are in convincing providers to improve their clinical performance. None of the NHS staff I have spoken to has any problem with data publication; indeed, openness and transparency are as much in the interests of our hard-working NHS staff as they are in the interests of patients.

If the international evidence is to be taken at face value, the Scottish Government has created

an incredible opportunity this week by setting up the website and the project.

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

Jenny Marra: I will.

The test will be in how open, transparent and up to date the information will be. How innovative and ambitious can the Scottish Government be with the new tool for the success of our health service? I sincerely hope that it will grasp the opportunity and not have to be forced bit by bit into publishing more and more information, as it has been over the past few weeks. The way in which the SNP, the health secretary and the First Minister have come to the publication of weekly statistics has been surprising and disappointing given that they have been at the top of the Government for eight years, but they eventually reached the right conclusion.

The Presiding Officer: You need to wind up.

Jenny Marra: It is now their ambition that is critical.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that there are serious problems across the country in Scotland's health service; regrets that there is a veil of secrecy over important statistics on the operation of NHS Scotland, and calls for a culture of transparency and openness with regular publication of statistics and reports so that the Parliament and the people of Scotland can be fully informed about the state of the health service.

14:55

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): I thank Labour and Jenny Marra in particular for the fantastic timing of this debate. It really could not have been better, on so many levels.

I am sure that I am not alone in the Parliament in my admiration for the work that the staff in our NHS do day in, day out. Both staffing and front-line funding of the NHS are now at record high levels, but I absolutely recognise that our health services face challenges.

I say to Jenny Marra, in answer to her specific questions earlier, that we are already rolling out the best practice for A and E on the Ninewells model to the rest of the A and E estate. If she had been looking at what we are doing, she would have known that. We are already doing that. On matrons, I saw Richard Simpson physically shrink at the concept of the matron. We are not in the 1970s. We are in 2015. We call them senior charge nurses, not matrons. I would have thought that Labour might keep up with what the Royal College of Nursing and the nurses themselves are saying about that.

The NHS currently produces a large volume of data on various aspects of its performance and makes that information available on the ISD website. However, while that information is available, I believe that it could be more accessible for people who do not regularly work with health statistics. That is why I have tasked Scottish Government officials with working with ISD in the coming months to establish a new NHS performs website to give quick and easy access to key NHS statistics either by hospital or by health board, as appropriate. That is something that Labour never did in the eight years for which it was in power. It is good that this SNP Government will be the one that delivers the most open, accountable and transparent NHS anywhere in these islands. If only Wales would follow suit, but I have written to the Welsh health minister suggesting that it may wish to do that. We will lead the way on this.

The service will be developed over time to ensure that information on things such as waiting times performance, cancelled operations, staffing levels and hospital activity rates is readily available. The regular collection of year-round A and E statistics began under this Government, because it was not done at all under the previous Administration. I welcome the chief statistician's decision to instigate weekly publication of A and E figures, which will make NHS Scotland even more accountable to the public and patients who use its services. The new weekly statistics will contain more detail on the length of waits than is currently published by NHS England.

I have set out in the chamber before that we must plan for an NHS not only for 2020 but beyond that, to ensure that it continues to deliver effective care for the people of Scotland, free at the point of need, long into the future. We are absolutely committed to a preventative programme that tackles the symptoms and causes of poor health and health inequalities, which too many people in Scotland still suffer. Population health improvement, at the same time as reducing demands on the health service in future years, is an absolute priority for us.

I want to try to reach as much consensus as possible on what we want our health and social care systems to look like over the longer timeframe, and the steps that we need to take to get there. That engagement will be on-going, but I would like to have reached broad agreement on the plan by the autumn of this year, as I have said previously. I believe that we can achieve consensus on the future direction of our NHS, and the offer that I have made to parties in the Parliament before still stands.

The people of Scotland deserve no less than our collective endeavours to enhance the NHS for

the future. That is why it was so disappointing for the Scottish Labour Party to wilfully and deliberately misinterpret data on the NHS. I hope that, at some point, Jenny Marra will apologise to the staff involved. She asked me about apologising for the cancelled operations and I willingly did so. I am big enough to apologise for the things that I think are wrong. Perhaps Jenny Marra needs to be big enough to apologise for the things that are blatantly wrong that her party has done. It was a desperate attempt to continue to talk down our NHS.

I heard Jenny Marra try to gloss over the issue and claim that Labour had misinterpreted the data that it received from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Fortunately, in the spate of online deletions, it forgot to remove the actual response it got from Glasgow from its website, although I am sure that it will be gone before the end of the debate. It provides a table that breaks down the reasons for cancellations, and in that table, as clear as day, it says how many were cancelled for clinical reasons. It is there in black and white.

It is exactly that sort of fiddling of the figures by Labour that was so evident in its time in office, when more than 30,000 people were on hidden waiting lists; it is also why more than double the number of people trust the SNP with the NHS than trust Labour. There is little wonder about that after Jenny Marra's and Jim Murphy's performance during the past few days. The reality is that the NHS as a whole is performing better today, against tougher targets, than when Labour was in office in Scotland or than in Wales, where it is in office today.

Given that Labour has tried to deride NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's performance on operations this week, I point out that since the introduction of the 12-week treatment time guarantee for in-patients, the board's performance against that target has been 99.9 per cent. We should congratulate the board on that.

Taking responsibility is hard. Labour's reaction to being caught red-handed was to blame one of its poor researchers. Labour said that its researcher had miscalculated. I wonder whether it was the same researcher who took the picture of Jenny Marra outside the old, closed down Glenwood health centre and not the shiny new one that is just a few metres away. That was yet another attempt to misrepresent the health service. Labour has been caught out. It cannot be trusted on the NHS and everybody now knows it.

The treatment time guarantee acts as a long stop and helps to ensure that if someone has their operation cancelled, the board works to treat them as quickly as possible. The people of Scotland will find it deeply troubling that Labour, through Richard Simpson, has previously confirmed in the

chamber that it would scrap the treatment time guarantee. The Labour Party will live to regret that.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife (Lab)): That is absolutely incorrect. I said that the Government has made it a legal guarantee rather than a target, and a legal guarantee means that the Government is breaking the law for 12,000 Scottish patients a year.

While I am on my feet, what about the delayed discharges that are on the standard weekly template? The cabinet secretary has not mentioned publishing them but every board makes them available to the Government every week and the Government is hiding them.

Shona Robison: I am happy to publish as much information as possible. The Government is getting to grips with delayed discharges, which is something that the Labour Government never did. Richard Simpson is on the record as saying that he would get rid of the legal treatment time guarantee.

Dr Simpson: Legal.

Shona Robison: He wants to remove patients' legal rights. That has been confirmed yet again in the chamber today, and I thank Richard Simpson for that.

The progress of the NHS in recent years has been tracked by the progressive increase in the volume of statistics that is available, which allows for comparisons with other health systems. That is why the Wales Audit Office was able to report in January on a comparison between performance on elective surgery within the United Kingdom and concluded that

"Scotland and England are performing better"

than Wales

"against more stringent referral to treatment time targets".

Jenny Marra: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shona Robison: In a minute.

That is also why we can compare accident and emergency performance in Scotland with other parts of the UK and with other health systems. For example, in 2014 Scotland's A and E departments outperformed those in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, as well as England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Jenny Marra: Will Shona Robison publish delayed discharge figures on the website?

Shona Robison: I am happy to publish delayed discharge figures on the website, because this SNP Government will deliver the most open, transparent NHS information system within these islands and we will be proud to do so.

The work of our Scottish patient safety programme has helped to bring real benefits through action in hospitals around the country, utilising performance statistics to monitor progress and identify where action is needed. Yesterday, we saw that the hospital standardised mortality ratios have reduced by over 16 per cent since 2007, which is testament to the work of our patient safety leaders and NHS staff right around the country.

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

Shona Robison: I am more than happy to talk about how statistics can improve transparency around the performance of the NHS, because I believe that we can use the NHS performs website to tell a fantastic story about the NHS's performance—one that the Labour Party wants to talk down. Our staff in the NHS are doing a fantastic job and it behoves politicians of all parties not to talk down the NHS. We will make sure, through NHS performs, that we continue to tell the fantastic story of that performance across the whole country.

I move amendment S4M-12325.3, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"thanks the staff of the NHS for their hard work during the challenging winter period; notes that in recent years there has been a progressive increase in the statistics available on the performance of NHS Scotland; welcomes that, from 3 March 2015, weekly A&E performance statistics will be published on the website, NHS Performs, and that NHS Scotland's Information Services Division will also be identifying how it can further enhance the accessibility of NHS performance statistics in consultation with the users of statistics and the wider public, and strongly condemns the recent misrepresentation of information on NHS performance, which devalues the work of Scotland's health service."

15:06

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): When I learned that Labour's debate today was to be about protecting Scotland's communities, I did not expect the focus to be yet again on the NHS, with an unrelenting emphasis on an alleged lack of transparency and openness regarding the operation of the service in Scotland. A major role of the Opposition is to scrutinise the Government of the day, but I find it utterly abhorrent that the NHS is, at times, being used for party political gain—regrettably, I have to say, by both main parties in the chamber. That is why our amendment refers to

"the use of rhetoric such as 'weaponising'"

and to claims, which were made during the latter stages of last year's referendum campaign, that the future of the NHS would be secure only if Scotland became an independent country.

The NHS is a precious institution to all of us, and any threat to it, real or perceived, is of huge public concern. The last thing that people want is to see the NHS being used as a political tool by parties that are seeking victory at forthcoming elections. It is far too important for that. Everyone I speak to outside this place wants that to stop and asks that politicians of all parties and none come together in support of our NHS and in developing it for the future.

Nobody is denying that our health service is currently and increasingly under very severe pressure or that there are times when it struggles to cope with the demands that are placed on it. There have always been added problems during the winter months, but, as the population ages and many more people are living with multiple and complex health conditions, the pressures on NHS services and staff are relentless and they struggle to cope with demand.

My party absolutely agrees that detailed scrutiny of the NHS is essential as the demands on it continue to escalate in an era in which resources are tight. Of course, that requires the regular publication of rigorously produced statistics and reports that give all of us—both parliamentarians and the public—an accurate picture of the operation of the NHS.

There is now undoubtedly more openness about the NHS than I have known in all my years of involvement with it and more involvement of patients in their planned care. That is a good thing and must continue to improve. Every week, the Health and Sport Committee receives a list of published Health Improvement Scotland inspection reports. For instance, this week we were notified of nine such reports covering hospitals in four health board areas. The Care Inspectorate also provides much useful information in its reports, which are aimed at improving standards in Scotland's many care homes.

Next week, we will discuss with the health secretary the recently published report on the *Clostridium difficile* outbreaks at the Vale of Leven hospital, which found many faults and made many recommendations that, if carried out, should ensure that there is no repeat in Scotland of the failings that were found in that hospital. Like others, we welcome the Government's announcement yesterday that it now plans to publish A and E statistics on a weekly basis.

All those measures are extremely important in developing a clear understanding of the pressures on the system and, where the need for improvement is identified, how that can be undertaken quickly and effectively. However, we need to listen to the warning from Dr Peter Bennie, the chairman of BMA Scotland, who says that,

although the weekly publishing of statistics can be a useful indicator of pressure in one part of the system, we must avoid reducing the NHS as a whole to a set of weekly performance figures, skewing the public's perception of the health service and ignoring the system-wide pressures that extend far beyond A and E.

Dr Bennie is absolutely right that pressure on emergency departments is a symptom of wider pressures across the NHS and that problems in one part of the service cannot be addressed without looking at the whole system. That is why we respect coal-face organisations such as the BMA and the RCN when they seek the co-operation of all stakeholders in the NHS, including politicians, in giving thorough and objective consideration to what needs to change to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NHS in Scotland as it faces the inexorable demands that are being placed upon it.

For a start, we need to relieve the pressures on our emergency and acute services by effectively planning and developing primary and social care to keep people within the community, at home or in homely settings, for as long as possible. That is why it is so important that we successfully achieve the integration of health and social care right across the country.

We need serious discussion about and planning for the future of the NHS, and that must involve all health professions that contribute to primary, secondary and tertiary care, as well as the local authority, third and independent sectors on which much community care depends; politicians at a local and national level; and most important, the patients and carers whose wellbeing depends on a well-run service. That sort of planning cannot be achieved by political point-scoring. Not for the first time this year, I must stress the need for co-operation between politicians on all sides and plead that, where the NHS is concerned, we look at agreeing a way forward and working together to find a sustainable future for an NHS that has been the envy of the world and whose staff deserve our full support but are becoming increasingly demoralised by the constant bickering of their elected representatives.

The Scottish Conservatives are willing and ready to co-operate in that way, and we challenge other parties to do the same. That is what our constituents and the NHS staff who work so hard on our behalf expect of us, and that is what they deserve from us.

Bruce Crawford: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): The member is closing.

Nanette Milne: I look forward to the open debate and, although I do not think that this will

happen, I hope that it will be conducted in a constructive manner. I am pleased to move the amendment in Jackson Carlaw's name and, having studied the Government's amendment, I can say that we will support that, too, assuming that it is carried at decision time.

I move amendment S4M-12325.2, to leave out from "regrets" to end and insert:

"accepts that these challenges make detailed scrutiny of the NHS in Scotland essential; notes the importance of rigorously produced and publicly available data to the process of that scrutiny; acknowledges the representations from the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing supporting further consideration of the long-term sustainability of NHS Scotland; considers it necessary to ensure effective planning of primary and social care in order to remove pressure from hospital emergency departments, and regrets attempts to misuse the debate on the future of the NHS for political ends, whether by the use of rhetoric such as 'weaponising' or through the claims made surrounding this valued and important institution toward the end of last year's referendum campaign."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jim Hume. You have a maximum of six minutes, Mr Hume—we are tight for time this afternoon.

15:12

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): First, I am delighted that the cabinet secretary has chosen to accept in full the Liberal Democrat amendment, which asks for the weekly reporting of A and E figures. It is quite a turnaround—or even, one might say, a U-turn—given the Government's opposition to this measure up to now. The Lib Dems welcome the Scottish Government's bending to Opposition pressure to release A and E waiting times weekly; given that the information is already available to ministers, it is only right and in the interests of accountability that it is made fully available.

The move, which has come after considerable pressure from across the political benches, was the sole focus of an earlier Liberal Democrat amendment. We have been calling for this for one day less than four weeks, and I find it curious that we should see such a radical change from the Government in such a short timeframe after such opposition to weekly reporting. Indeed, the cabinet secretary claimed that she had no influence over such a move, saying that that would amount to political interference.

It is a pity, therefore, that the Government announced the news through the press just yesterday afternoon instead of engaging in a meaningful discussion with MSPs and health spokespeople across the benches in a collaborative way. Perhaps this is yet more proof, if proof were needed, of the power of Opposition.

Shona Robison: I want to correct Jim Hume. If he had been paying attention, he would have known that the announcement was made through the chief statistician's office.

Jim Hume: I saw your words on a Scottish Government press release on a website just yesterday afternoon—although, having said that, I should make it clear, Presiding Officer, that they were not your words, but the words of the cabinet secretary.

Our dedicated front-line NHS staff strive to provide second-to-none care for every patient and deserve our respect, and it is incumbent on the Scottish Government to look at the waiting times in our A and E units and act swiftly on behalf of our patients and NHS staff. That is why the Lib Dems have been calling on the Government to stand behind the principles of accountability and openness with regard to A and E waiting times.

By releasing weekly figures to the public, the Government will, of course, be subject to tougher and more rigorous scrutiny, but I think that that will ultimately improve areas where we know that some of our A and E units are failing. The benefits for patients will be obvious but, equally, addressing problem areas quickly with support for staff will go a long way towards taking pressure off staff and, I believe, boosting morale.

It is critical that the new-found transparency is accompanied by real action from the Government to support our great NHS staff so that they can continue to provide the best care for patients. That is the crux of the new and revised Lib Dem amendment today. The weekly information will enable us to see the extent of the growing A and E waiting times, and where action is needed. We have seen a growing number of people waiting for more than four hours in some departments. We know about the recent incident at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley, where a special support team was sent to provide help to the A and E section, and the Government claimed that that was a responsible move. In Glasgow two weeks ago, patients had to wait up to 20 hours in a portakabin to be seen at the Victoria infirmary.

We do not want that happening in other areas of Scotland. The severe understaffing and under-resourcing in those situations were hidden in the vast figures of monthly ISD statistics; the health secretary must not be allowed to hide behind a wall of figures. Ultimately, through weekly publishing, the Government will quite rightly be held accountable more swiftly, meaning that staff and patients can have confidence that an open conversation with MSPs, patients and NHS staff can be had in order to identify and target where help and support for workers is most needed, through flexible resources, more accountability and better management of resources.

It is a move supported by health professionals. The BMA stated that the NHS faces pressure in the A and E units because of

“wider pressures across the NHS, which is struggling to cope with rising demand in the face of increasing numbers of elderly people with multiple health conditions, alongside constrained resources.”

It becomes even more necessary to allow for the movement of information, and I urge the health secretary to engage fully on the issues that we know are problem areas in the NHS.

The Royal College of Nursing Scotland's senior officer said:

“Many nursing staff working in Glasgow have been in contact with us to let us know how worried they are and concerned about how they can care for patients safely when there are so few staff and equipment is in such short supply.”

There are also warnings of delayed discharges and delayed operations.

The Government must improve its record on A and E waiting times. I am sure that we all want that. Westminster has done it recently and I am delighted that the cabinet secretary has now agreed with the Lib Dems to publish weekly figures. However, it should be a reminder to the Scottish Government that it needs to take heed of what those at the front line of the NHS are saying on the wider issues of sustainable staffing and resourcing for the long term. Geriatric beds have been cut by a third since 2010, boarding has soared to 3,000 and our hospitals are being bottlenecked. In the past two years, 16,500 NHS staff have been signed off work with mental health issues.

A and E weekly reporting is one aspect. It is now vital that, going forward, the Scottish Government outline what measures it will take in targeting the pinch points that we know exist in our A and E departments, and long-term staffing and resourcing must be key to that. I look for support for the Liberal Democrat amendment across the chamber.

I move amendment S4M-12325.1, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the Scottish Government's decision to abandon its objections to the publication of weekly A&E waiting times, after considerable pressure from across the Parliament, and calls on the Scottish Government to set out how it will use the new information, in partnership with local communities, to improve waiting times across Scotland”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come now to the open debate. I am afraid that we are already short of time. Speeches must be a maximum of six minutes.

15:18

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The Scottish Government has a strong record on increasing transparency and openness in the NHS. After all, it was this Scottish Government that began the routine publishing of treatment time statistics, including progress being made towards the 18-week referral to treatment target and the 12-week treatment time guarantee. That is to be commended; it is not secrecy.

Likewise, it was the current Scottish Government that began to routinely publish statistics on compliance with the four-hour A and E target and on the number of 12-hour breaches. Those statistics were not collected before; Labour preferred to keep them hidden. I ask Parliament to work out, on the balance of probabilities, who is secretive and who is transparent.

I welcome the latest announcement to go further than ever before and to make a significant amount of NHS data easily accessible and available from March 2015 on the Scotland Performs website. It will include weekly statistics on A and E performance, and I hope to say a little more about that later.

Across a range of measures, the current Scottish Government has already made far more information available than was available under any previous Labour Administration. For instance, Parliament will remember the farce of Labour's hidden waiting lists, with around 35,000 people with no guarantee of when treatment would take place and no published statistics to admit that those people existed or say what the length of their wait was likely to be. That is secrecy.

This Scottish Government ended that system when it brought in the new ways system, which ensured that all patient waits were recorded, statistics were published and transparency was brought into the process. Indeed, when the Scottish Government identified that that system had to be improved further during our time in Administration, we acted once more and improved it further.

I want to share some further statistics with the chamber. I assure Scottish Labour that these statistics are accurate—I have actually checked them. If we compare the period from October to December 2007 with the period from July to September 2014—in other words, the lifespan of this current Scottish Government—we see an improvement of more than 16 per cent in mortality ratios in Scotland's hospitals. The NHS has never been so safe. I am pleased to say that the hospitals in the area that I represent—including the Western infirmary, Gartnavel, Glasgow royal infirmary and the Southern general hospital—do better than the national picture. Despite some bad

press they have been subject to recently, that is to be welcomed.

All of that is publicly available information, but we are never going to hear about it from the Labour Party. Labour is silent on that; there is a veil of silence from the Labour Party on all of that. Of course, we all know why. It is because it just does not fit in with its false narrative about an NHS in crisis.

Likewise, I do not see Labour being keen to tell people about the plummeting levels of hospital-acquired infections and the huge progress that has been made in that regard. If I recall rightly, the Labour Party has form in dodgy health statistics in this area. I believe that it was Jackie Baillie who rushed out a press release slamming the level of hospital-acquired infections in Scotland, before realising that the statistics that she was using referred to the time period when Labour was in charge of the NHS. While Jackie Baillie was calling Scotland

“the superbug capital of Europe”

the reality was that, under the Scottish National Party Government, hospital-acquired infections were down 70 per cent and were the lowest since records began. That is a dodgy dossier. That is misleading people. It is this Government that has been open and transparent.

The reason why I draw attention to hospital-acquired infections is that it is the current Scottish Government that established the Healthcare Environment Inspectorate and tasked it to carry out rigorous inspections and to publish findings publicly and in a way that is accessible to all. Sometimes that leads to newspaper headlines that are uncomfortable for the Scottish Government, but it was this Scottish Government that established that inspectorate, is identifying where services have to be improved and is taking action to improve them. That is why mortality rates are improving and hospital-acquired infection rates are falling. The system is open, transparent, public and accountable.

Jenny Marra was on “Good Morning Scotland” this morning. When it was put to her that the SNP Scottish Government publishes more information than was published by any Labour Government, Ms Marra did not deny it. I welcome that. Ms Marra went on to say that there was now a different culture, with different pressures and different challenges, and she identified challenges in relation to delayed discharge. I absolutely agree with her in that regard. However, again we saw selective use of statistics, because the statistics show that, under this Scottish Government, delayed discharge has fallen by two thirds.

I am minded to agree with the words of Dr Peter Bennie, the chair of BMA Scotland, which we heard earlier.

Dr Simpson: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: I am just finishing.

I welcome the weekly publishing of statistics, but picking one week at any given time can skew the public's perception of a service. It is important that those statistics are put on the record, but we have to consider the service in the round and think about the improvement over a long period of time. The record shows that it is this Government that has achieved that improvement and this Government that has put more information into the public domain than ever before.

15:24

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I was going to start by welcoming the Government's change of heart with regard to the publication of the A and E data, but I should obviously thank the chief statistician instead. It is good that the statistician has told the cabinet secretary who is boss, stepped up to the plate and taken charge of the NHS. We have been asking for some time that the cabinet secretary do that, and it is really good that somebody has taken on that challenge because it was the right decision.

The NHS belongs to the people and not to the Government. The people have a right to know what is happening and what their expectation should be. We now look forward to the chief statistician making a similar announcement on weekly bedblocking statistics and, indeed, real-time publication of NHS statistics. Only when that happens will we have a transparent service.

Shona Robison: Rhoda Grant needs to understand that the chief statistician decided on the weekly statistics because the statistic was already available and he decides on the frequency. In terms of new reporting, we decide on what new measures should be reported if they are not already reported upon. That is why I announced the NHS performs website, which I hope she will welcome.

Rhoda Grant: That is as clear as mud. We have to wait for the chief statistician to decide whether to publish the other statistics weekly. We know who is in charge. Perhaps the cabinet secretary will appeal to him to publish those statistics.

The past few months in the NHS have been a nightmare for patients and staff. We have a national health service that is unable to cope with basic winter pressures due to the Government's neglect of its duty. It has ignored not only our pleas for action but, what is more, the pleas made

by staff in the NHS, their trade unions and their professional bodies. Indeed, it has also ignored pleas made by patients.

The Government is still in denial, suggesting that we are playing politics rather than highlighting the concerns of real people. That is wrong. What is worse is that it appears to ignore the pleas of staff and patients, aided and abetted—most disappointingly—by its friends in the Tory party.

That mismanagement has placed an unacceptable strain on NHS staff. We know that people in the caring professions work above and beyond the call of duty—that is in their nature. *[Interruption.]* If the SNP MSPs think that that is funny, they should perhaps spend some time on the front line working with staff in the NHS who make up for their neglect of the service. The Government is abusing that good will, and that is totally unacceptable.

Christian Allard: Will Rhoda Grant give way?

Rhoda Grant: No, I will not take an intervention. I have already taken one.

Staff shortages throughout the NHS have meant the withdrawal of some services. *[Interruption.]*

Shona Robison: What do the staff think about Labour?

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): You should hear what they are saying about you, Shona.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Neil Bibby: They are fed up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order!

Rhoda Grant: Perhaps if the cabinet secretary were to listen in silence to some of the real experiences of patients in the NHS, she might take some notice of them. I will highlight some of the issues in my region.

For example, if somebody in Skye has a baby, they had better do it in working hours—otherwise they will spend several hours in the back of an ambulance travelling to maternity services in Inverness because there are no out-of-hours maternity services in Skye any more. That is not a great journey at the best of times, and it is certainly not a great journey when somebody is in labour.

Endoscopy services in Skye have been totally withdrawn, which also means that patients have to travel to Inverness for their procedures. Locums are running the hospital services in Wick and Caithness, which is not sustainable. Because of lack of training, it seems impossible to attract and appoint qualified permanent staff to continue the current service delivery.

The community and local health board, not the Scottish Government, are coming together to work up a sustainable model. It is absolutely unacceptable that, until that model is delivered, people travel more than 100 miles to get procedures that could be carried out on their doorsteps. The Government talks about care in the community and treatment closer to home, but the direction of travel is in the opposite direction.

Operations are being cancelled. A constituent phoned me a couple of weeks ago and told me the story of an elderly woman—a neighbour of hers—who is waiting for a hip replacement. She was in agony and obviously really concerned about her operation, which was cancelled at short notice due to unscheduled care pressures. However, the stress of waiting for that operation continues, with her pain worsening until the operation takes place.

Shona Robison: Will Rhoda Grant give way?

Rhoda Grant: If the cabinet secretary will apologise to that woman, I will take the intervention.

Shona Robison: As I always say, I regret it if anybody has not had the service that they should expect. However, is it not a great example of what is wrong with Labour's portrayal of the health service that, particularly given what she said about Skye, Rhoda Grant did not even mention the fact that I have given approval for the new hospital in Skye? Should we not have a balanced view? Will she welcome that decision? It is good for the people of Skye.

Rhoda Grant: I certainly welcome the decision to build the new hospital in Skye, but it has been a long time coming and it does nothing for the mothers who are travelling to Inverness in the back of an ambulance at this moment in time, which the cabinet secretary should be concerning herself with right here and right now.

In Harris, there are no general practitioner out-of-hours services. Patients have to travel to the hospital in Stornoway to access out-of-hours services over the highest road in the islands, which is a dangerous route at any time but is much worse in wintry weather conditions. That is not good enough.

NHS Highland has informed staff that if they require a bank nurse they can only get someone at the nursing assistant grade, not at the grade of the person who they are taking over from. That is totally unacceptable and puts patients at risk.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you need to close.

Rhoda Grant: This Government needs to step up to the plate; it needs to take charge of the NHS; it needs to support the staff who are working extremely hard to make up for its shortcomings;

and it needs to give the patients who are suffering under its management the treatment that they deserve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I make it clear to members that they cannot go beyond six minutes.

15:31

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): We are now almost halfway through the debate and we have still to hear an apology from Scottish Labour after its leader Jim Murphy was caught red-handed fiddling NHS figures and trying to save himself a red face by deleting his false tweets and his YouTube video making those false claims.

Talking of red faces, someone really has to have a brass neck to come to this chamber, as Jenny Marra did today, to praise NHS staff while failing to apologise for undermining their hard work by publishing false statistics about operation times. Labour's misrepresentation was not a minor matter; out of the 292 cancelled operations that were cited by Jim Murphy, more than 200 were cancelled for clinical reasons—that is more than 70 per cent. Ms Marra is on very shaky ground when she comes here to talk about honesty, transparency and statistics, given Labour's own appalling record on such matters—on hidden waiting lists, for example, or on that embarrassing photograph of Ms Marra herself outside the Glenrothes health centre that had been replaced by a £5.8 million new facility.

In her speech, Ms Marra introduced another blooper into Labour's abysmal record on these matters. She cited the consultancy McKinsey to attack the Scottish NHS. If she had done her homework—she might end up blaming her researcher for this; who knows?—Ms Marra would have known that McKinsey is a company that has been regularly exposed for its role in privatising the NHS in England. Dr Phil Hammond, the respected doctor and commentator, said that McKinsey is the firm that “hijacked the NHS” in England. For example, McKinsey drew up many of the clauses in Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Act 2012—the legislation that has taken the NHS in England far down the road towards privatisation; a journey, incidentally, that began with Tony Blair's Labour Party when it established foundation hospitals in England.

McKinsey is already benefiting from contracts arising from the Health and Social Care Act 2012, according to an extensive investigation by Tamasin Cave of Spinwatch, which monitors the lobbying industry. Serious concerns have been expressed about the revolving door between the marketised English NHS, McKinsey and the Government. Indeed, one of McKinsey's

executives was an adviser to Tony Blair and then went on to head up Monitor, which is the regulator of the NHS south of the border.

McKinsey, of course, worked closely with the last UK Labour Government on health, and in 2009 it produced a report recommending that the NHS in England cut 10 per cent of its staff. Within weeks of the coalition taking power, McKinsey had been awarded a £6 million contract by Mr Lansley's department. Serious questions have been raised about the fact that McKinsey represents private healthcare companies around the world, which is a serious conflict of interest when it has worked with the NHS in England. Ms Marra should be very careful about who she cites in evidence to trash the Scottish NHS.

Dr Hammond has praised the NHS in Scotland under this Government for rejecting the kind of market competition that has brought the NHS in England close to destruction. This Government has a very good record on health. We have 17,000 more nurses than we had under Labour, and those are real nurses, not the fictitious 1,000-plus nurses of Jim Murphy's imagination. We have 13,000 more consultants. Perhaps most important of all, patient satisfaction is higher in Scotland than anywhere else in the UK. According to the social attitudes survey, 75 per cent of patients are satisfied with the NHS in Scotland compared with 51 per cent in Wales, where the NHS is in Labour's hands.

Also significantly, the NHS in Scotland is more trusted in the SNP's hands, according to a Survation poll taken in January. I have to say that I am not very surprised by that statistic, given what we have seen over the last couple of days and the lies that Labour is prepared to tell in order to gain political advantage in this matter.

15:36

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in Scottish Labour's debate this afternoon about the need for open and transparent information in the challenges that face our national health service.

I want to focus my remarks today specifically on the challenges that are facing the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley—the hospital where I was born, the hospital where I have been a patient as a child and an adult, and the hospital where I have visited family and friends. It is, however, a hospital that has recently been in the headlines for all the wrong reasons, and where thousands of patients and staff have been badly let down and have been failed over recent months.

As has been said already this afternoon, we should have full transparency and openness in our national health service. RAH patients want to

know what has gone wrong and what will be done to fix the problems that their health service is experiencing. I welcome the fact that the chief statistician and the Scottish Government have listened to the persistent calls from Labour members and have finally agreed to make their weekly A and E statistics public. There should be no veil of secrecy.

Bob Doris: Has Neil Bibby had a chance to look at mortality rates for the Royal Alexandra hospital? For clarity, they are combined with the rates for the Vale of Leven hospital. Since this Government has been in power, the mortality rate has fallen—it has improved to the tune of 19.6 per cent. Is that something that the member welcomes under this Government?

Neil Bibby: I know that there have been issues related to mortality rates at the Royal Alexandra hospital, and I welcome any progress in reducing them.

One statistic that we already know—it is shocking—is that 23 per cent of patients, which is almost one in four people, waited for longer than the four-hour target time for treatment at the RAH in December last year. Last week, after concerns had been raised by staff and patients for months, a support team was finally sent into the RAH, confirming the A and E crisis.

That crisis was apparent to anyone who had spoken to patients and staff over recent months, and it would have been highlighted at an earlier stage had A and E statistics been published more frequently. It is welcome that a crisis team has finally been sent in, but one wonders whether the health secretary has a grip on the situation when she denies on the Monday that there is a crisis but on Tuesday sends in a crisis team to a major hospital.

Shona Robison: I do not deny the challenges at the Royal Alexandra hospital, which is why we sent the team in. What I take exception to is Labour's portrayal, in which every A and E department in Scotland is in crisis. That is clearly and blatantly not the case. Will Neil Bibby accept that?

Neil Bibby: There are far too many hospitals that are not meeting their A and E waiting-time targets, and the RAH is certainly one of them.

I have been contacted by dozens of patients and staff over recent weeks. I want to share some of their experiences and to ask some questions of the health secretary on their behalf. One woman described to me recently how her mother had a 13 and a half hour wait in A and E with two broken bones in her back. Another told me how her father waited four and a half hours for an ambulance, and when he finally got to the RAH there were no trolleys available and no porters to find one. The

health secretary will be aware that other patients have waited for up to 20 hours.

Those are not criticisms of the dedicated and hard-working staff at the RAH. In fact, several people have provided me with examples of the outstanding work that staff are doing in extremely difficult circumstances. One man described how, when he was in the hospital for a knee operation recently, the nursing staff even turned their eating area into a waiting room for patients who could not get a bed. Staff are going above and beyond the call of duty.

I have a significant number of questions for the health secretary on behalf of patients and staff. Given that she wants to be as open and transparent as possible, I hope that she will answer those questions for RAH patients and staff. If she cannot do so in her closing speech, I would welcome a response in writing.

How long does the cabinet secretary envisage the support team being in the hospital? What were the weekly stats for the RAH that she received last Tuesday at noon, which was the day on which she sent in the support team? Does the cabinet secretary agree that there are staff shortages at the RAH? Does she accept what staff and patients have been saying about the shortage of beds to meet current demand and, if so, what does she intend to do about it? Given that the cabinet secretary had so much to say about cancelled operations, can she tell us how many cancelled operations there have been at the RAH in the past few months? I am certainly aware of constituents who have had operations cancelled.

Patients and staff are demanding answers to those questions. We have seen concerns about adverts for volunteers at the RAH's A and E department. Do the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary still support the use of volunteers in A and E? The cabinet secretary will know that it was reported in *The Herald* last week that the Government has been made aware of two critical and very serious incidents in which patients at the RAH were injured while at A and E. People rightly expect such serious incidents to be fully investigated to find out why they occurred and how they can be prevented from happening again. How many other critical incidents has the cabinet secretary been made aware of in the RAH and in other hospitals?

I hope that the health secretary will be able to respond to those questions. My final question to her is simple. She has called on Jenny Marra to apologise, but given that the NHS Scotland chief executive has apologised to patients at the RAH, I ask the cabinet secretary to apologise to patients and staff there, because they have been badly let down by her Government. Our NHS and the RAH

in Paisley deserve much better than they are currently getting.

15:42

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): We need a good sense of humour when we see some of the Labour Party-sponsored motions these days and the way in which they are camouflaged. Labour is not doing Parliament any service through how it words motions in advance, because we end up talking about something that does not fit with the motion that was lodged.

That said, given Labour's record in the area, who would believe that Labour would bring to Parliament a motion that reads as this one does? When we investigate Labour's record in comparison with the SNP's, we might almost laugh if the issue were not so serious, because just about every stat on the SNP's record knocks Labour's stat out of the park—through a time when the Scottish budget has been persistently cut by British Governments of all colours.

The SNP is delivering record spending, with a health budget of over £12 billion and an extra £383 billion this year. [*Interruption.*] The SNP Government is delivering record levels of staff, with 1,300 more consultants, 1,700 more qualified nurses and midwives and 9,600 extra staff overall having been recruited since Labour ran the health service.

The Scottish people are not daft—they see the effects of our total commitment to the national health service. In Scotland, 73 per cent of people are satisfied with the health service, compared with only 63 per cent in England, where the Tories run the health service. However, who would have thought it possible that the Tories, while struggling to match the SNP's record on NHS satisfaction, would do better than the Labour Party, which runs the health service in Wales, where the satisfaction rate with the NHS is at a disastrous 51 per cent? The Labour Party has some brass neck to come to the Parliament today with this jumped-up motion.

However, let us not just look at the Labour Party in Wales, where it has slashed the budget. Iain Gray said that he would not have ring fenced the health budget if Labour had won the election in 2011. Well, thank goodness that the people re-elected the SNP, or we would now be facing the same problems that people in Wales are facing. That is what you get when you do not ring fence.

It should never be forgotten that when it was in power in Scotland, Labour was closing Monklands hospital and Ayr general hospital at the same time as it was salami-slicing services at the Vale of Leven hospital, with the view to closing it eventually. The Vale of Leven Hospital served and—thanks to the SNP Government—continues

to serve a number of people in my constituency, which is one of many reasons why people in the area tell me that they trust the SNP on the NHS. What would waiting times be like now without those hospitals, which would have been closed? More than 1 million patients would not have been able to attend them.

As far as transparency goes, it was the SNP Government that routinely published statistics on four-hour A and E targets and on the number of 12-hour breaches. What did Labour do? Labour buried those statistics and kept them secret. We introduced routine monitoring and reporting of hospital-acquired infections. We created the Healthcare Environment Inspectorate to carry out rigorous inspections and we instructed it—yes: instructed it—to publish those findings.

Jenny Marra: Not the chief statistician?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Gil Paterson: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

Jenny Marra should not bother talking to me. She should talk to the BBC, who will put out her mince, whether it has been cooked or not.

When we came to power there was a shortage of dentists in some parts of Scotland—in some locations it was best described as chronic. We brought in an additional 430 dentists. We have increased the number of general practitioners by 7 per cent and reduced the number of service managers by 29 per cent. We are making a difference where it really counts, exceeding the target set in that regard for April this year. Funding is in place to ensure that 500 new health visitor posts will be created in the NHS in Scotland over the next four years. The list goes on and on.

The Labour Party is in the business of talking down the NHS. It claims disaster after disaster in order to paint in the minds of the people of Scotland a false picture of the NHS. It is prepared to do down our health service relentlessly, just to attack the SNP, which is hardly what I would call protecting Scotland's communities. It is more about protecting Labour Party seats. The health service is expendable for Jim Murphy and the Labour Party. How could it be otherwise, even though all the indicators are that we need to be consistent on the challenges that we face? Labour is trying to take down the SNP by talking down the NHS in Scotland. Labour should be completely ashamed of itself because of how it has used its motion today, and how it has handled itself in the past few days. It is a disgrace.

15:48

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

Like Gil Paterson, I will say what a shame it is how things have been handled over the past few days.

A few weeks ago I shared my surprise that Labour had lodged for debate a motion about health under the title "Scotland's Future". Today, Labour is at it again: under a misleading title—"Protecting Scotland's Communities"—here we are, talking about health again. If anyone from Labour would like to apologise, please stand up. No? I thought not.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Apologise for what?

Christian Allard: For this: for lodging a motion whose title has nothing to do with the motion. It is misleading: nothing else. The only explanation that I can find is that orders are coming from London to weaponise the NHS. No distinct message is allowed in UK Labour plc, so we therefore must debate NHS Scotland again.

However, I will not pretend, as other members have done, that the NHS is a UK organisation. We might face similar challenges, but the way in which we are responding to those challenges is very different.

Let me repeat what I said a few weeks ago: under an SNP Government we have not only protected the NHS budget, but have increased it, despite the cuts to our own budget—Tory cuts that are supported by Labour at Westminster. The picture that the Labour party has been desperate to paint since the beginning of the year is not based on facts. One might think that an election is looming.

The Scottish branch of the Labour Party's desperate attempts to run the same campaign against the NHS in Scotland as UK Labour is running in England will not work. Labour has been found out time after time. Not only is NHS Scotland performing better than the NHS in England, but the Scottish Government has shown leadership, working in collaboration with NHS boards and local authorities, in setting out a great vision for an integrated health and social care service.

I can report, Presiding Officer, that NHS Grampian is working seamlessly to implement the SNP Government vision, which will address the challenges that all health services in the UK and beyond are experiencing. The pressure on social care services has been recognised and the Scottish Government has put in additional money to deal with delayed discharge.

Part of the problem within NHS Grampian is that Aberdeen City Council has got rid of its care services to an arm's-length company, which has

caused delayed discharges to rise dramatically. The member for Aberdeen Central, Kevin Stewart, reminds Parliament regularly that Bon Accord Care, the arm's-length company of Aberdeen City Council, has become a smokescreen to hide the failings of the Labour-run administration. On the train journey back to Aberdeen, Kevin Stewart frequently tells me that when he was a councillor there were no delayed discharges. Will Labour in Aberdeen apologise? I think not.

This is my third contribution to a debate about health this year, and in every one of them I thanked the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport and the First Minister for visiting our north-east hospitals. On Monday, the health secretary was in Aberdeen, again, speaking to the board and staff at Aberdeen royal infirmary. I thank her for that.

NHS Grampian is recruiting more nurses, and last Friday I heard at first hand how much better the new board is at investigating and responding to complaints. I suggested to the board and the elected representatives present that we all have a responsibility to highlight not only the complaints, but the many positive feedback comments from patients. We must make sure that the positive feedback is passed on to NHS staff.

I would like to congratulate both the new chair of the health board, Professor Stephen Logan, and the acting chief executive, Malcolm Wright, for deciding to conduct their public board meetings in a new transparent way. That is very important and matches the pace of improvement by the Scottish Government.

There is a lot to celebrate in NHS Grampian and a lot to be positive about. The Scottish Government has allocated a £49.1 million increase to the health board's budget for the next financial year. That equates to a 6.3 per cent rise. The SNP Government is showing commitment to delivering for North East Scotland; NHS Grampian funding is now within 1 per cent of parity with other NHS boards around Scotland, one year ahead of schedule.

Yesterday, our First Minister met cancer patients when she officially opened the new state-of-the-art £13.6 million radiotherapy department in Aberdeen. I look forward to many more visits from both the cabinet secretary and Scotland's First Minister.

There is a lot going on and a lot of good news for patients in the region. Two new projects have been unveiled: a new cancer centre and a new hospital—we are still debating what name it should have.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your final minute, Mr Allard.

Christian Allard: The two new projects are part of the £120 million from the Scottish Government's national delivery plan programme. The new hospital will be paid for under the non-profit distributing model and the project will be run under a design, build, finance and maintain contract over 25 years. Again, taxpayers' money is being used for public health and under a 25-year contract.

Will Labour stand up and apologise for the amount of debts that it has created with private finance initiatives? The cost of PFI repayments is one of the reasons why Labour cannot be trusted with the NHS. Its members should stand up and apologise.

Dr Simpson: Will someone switch my microphone on?

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

Christian Allard: I am closing.

Dr Simpson: He was taking an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be very brief, Dr Simpson.

Christian Allard: The Presiding Officer will decide.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is closing and we are running out of time.

Christian Allard: Labour cannot be trusted with our NHS, and its attacks on NHS Scotland have no public support because NHS staff in Scotland are working tirelessly under pressure to deliver high-quality care to patients.

I have a message for London Labour: bring as many health debates to the Scottish Parliament as you wish. I will be sure to speak in every one of them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I point out that members can take interventions only if they can do so within their six minutes.

15:54

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this important debate on protecting Scotland's communities. We know that Scotland's national health service faces significant pressures while, at the same time, it must make major changes to services in order to meet future needs. It pains me to read and hear about the horror stories that have been coming out of the NHS almost daily over the past few weeks, particularly those that come from my region of Glasgow. The recent petition from the Royal College of Nursing, signed by more than 7,000 people, complaining about inadequate staff parking at the new Southern general hospital, should have been predicted. When the new

Larbert hospital opened in 2010, the main complaint was lack of parking for cars. Why is the same problem arising again just five years later when the next new hospital is being built?

Shona Robison: I hope that Anne McTaggart realises that the application for additional car parking is with Glasgow City Council. Indeed, it is Glasgow City Council's responsibility to resolve the residents' parking issue. Surely she would acknowledge that in a more balanced view.

Anne McTaggart: I would have thought that the infrastructure of a new-build hospital would be looked at by more than just Glasgow City Council. The 7,000 people who have signed the petition obviously do not approve of what is currently there.

It is simply unacceptable that our hard-pressed NHS staff should have to worry about parking. Many nurses and doctors work shifts that require them to be in early and leave late in the darkness. Their safety, as well as ease of transport, should be a priority. That should have been monitored by the Scottish Government so that the issue could have been foreseen and tackled.

Figures published recently show that A and E patients across Scotland are being let down. The percentage of patients being treated in A and E in four hours or less dropped from 93.5 per cent in December 2013 to just 89.9 per cent in December 2014. The accident and emergency department in Glasgow's Western infirmary has the worst figures in Scotland for A and E waiting times: 31 per cent of patients wait for longer than four hours. The waiting time statistics for December 2014 show that the Western met the target for 69 per cent of its patients, which means that 548 patients waited for more than four hours. The stats also show that 242 patients had to wait for more than eight hours and, more worryingly, 13 patients had to wait for more than 12 hours.

The reality is that hospitals are simply understaffed. Scottish Labour has highlighted time and again the daily problems that face hard-working NHS staff across Scotland. More doctors and nurses are needed in our A and E departments. Scottish Labour had one principal demand for the Scottish budget: protect the NHS with an additional £100 million of front-line funds. That would have allowed hospitals that are facing extra pressure to plan surgery at the weekend and diagnostics in the evening. Developing that approach would also allow patients to have a health service that suits their lives—for example, it would enable elective surgery outwith people's working hours.

Labour members welcome the Scottish Government's U-turn on the weekly reporting of A and E figures, but it came too late as the current

NHS crisis could have been discovered much earlier. Ministers have been aware of the crisis since last autumn, but it has taken until now for them to admit it. It is not good enough that, under the SNP Government, the people of Scotland are forced to get the information that they need on the NHS from freedom of information laws. I call on the Scottish Government to publish the weekly figures for each hospital rather than for each health board.

Shona Robison: We can do that.

Anne McTaggart: I am pleased to hear that. The figures would be for both A and E and delayed discharges. They would help us to foresee future crises and allow people to observe the performance of their local hospitals.

There are serious problems in Scotland's health service and a lot of secrecy about important statistics. Behind each of those statistics, vulnerable patients and their families are suffering. That is why the Government needs to take urgent action right now, as there is no time to waste.

16:00

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am delighted that the cabinet secretary has announced the weekly publication of A and E performance data and that she is continuing—

Jim Hume: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike MacKenzie: Not as early on in my speech as this.

I am delighted that the cabinet secretary is continuing the trend, established by this Government, of publishing increasingly accurate information on the performance of the health service.

Jim Hume: Mike MacKenzie thanked the cabinet secretary for her announcement, but the cabinet secretary was quite clear that it was not her decision, but the decision of the chief statistician, to publish the data weekly.

Mike MacKenzie: Thank you, Mr Hume. If the member had paid closer attention to what I was saying rather than to the point that he was endeavouring to make, he would have heard me say that I was delighted that the cabinet secretary has announced the publication of the data. There is no contradiction there whatsoever.

The publication of the data is important in the interest of transparency and in order to provide a reliable guide to our health service's effectiveness. Perhaps it is also important to help prevent Labour Party members from making fools of themselves. That is not a trivial point, because while the Labour Party is at liberty to bark up the wrong

trees as much as it likes, it should take care in its politicisation of health matters. The effect of that is sometimes to place our hard-working health workers under even greater stress; often, the effect is to subject them to a siege, laid on them by the Labour Party, and to criticise them on false premises merely to score a political point. The last thing that our hard-working health workers require is to have their morale sapped in that way.

It is sad, too, that the Labour Party cannot think of a more constructive way of acting in opposition than to endlessly criticise our health service, especially because the facts speak otherwise. Patient satisfaction with the Scottish health service has never been higher. The 2014 British social attitudes survey, which was published only last month, indicates that 75 per cent of people in Scotland are satisfied with the NHS, compared with 65 per cent in England, and only 51 per cent in Labour-run Wales.

Health funding has increased to an all-time high, despite the reduction in the Scottish Government budget. Every penny of Barnett consequential has been passed on to the health service budget. That is why we have 1,300 more consultants, 1,700 more qualified nurses and midwives and, overall, 9,000 extra NHS staff than we had in 2006.

There is merit in producing the statistics. The public have a right to know how our health service is performing. This Government has done more than any previous Government to publish increasingly meaningful statistics—not to wrongly lay blame at the door of our hard-working health workers but, rightly, to tell the relative success story that is the Scottish national health service.

Our Scottish national health service, despite the many pressures on it, is performing better than it was when Labour was last in office in Scotland. It is also performing much better than the health service in England and much, much better than the Labour-controlled health service in Wales.

The health record of Labour when it was last in office in Scotland is not a good one. It is a story of hidden waiting lists, of Iain Gray's refusal to make a manifesto commitment to maintain the health budget and of the party's plans to close A and E departments at Monklands and Ayr. The Scottish people spoke loudly and clearly on Labour's record on health and other issues in 2011, and they will soon have another opportunity to speak. I suspect that they will speak loudly and clearly once again.

The Labour Party seems to think that Mr Murphy is a prophet. In reality, he is a piper and he is not leading Labour into the promised land; he is leading it further and deeper into the political wilderness.

16:05

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): A word that is overused in politics today is the word "crisis". Opposition politicians use it on almost every issue and in almost every press release that they send out. We have heard it being used in today's debate, yet it is far from the truth that what we are talking about is a crisis. Admittedly, the first member to use the word was Bob Doris, but he was referring to comments that the Labour Party had made. Anne McTaggart used the word "crisis". A crisis is what is happening in eastern Ukraine or in the middle east. The issue with health statistics or what is happening in the NHS in Scotland is not a crisis, regardless of whatever version of events Jim Murphy gives by press release, on Twitter or on YouTube.

Dr Simpson said that no one had used the word "crisis", but Jenny Marra used it yesterday, as did Jim Hume. Gemma Doyle used it in the *Daily Record* of 18 February, and Jim Murphy used it in the *Daily Record* on 3 February and 13 February. The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats have been using the word "crisis" to talk down our NHS.

The budget that the Parliament recently approved will mean that, for the first time ever, more than £12 billion will be spent on the NHS in Scotland. That includes an increase of £383 million this year. That is a staggering amount of money. Even if we were to increase that amount by another £5 billion or £10 billion, there would still be issues that would need to be addressed, such as the size of the NHS—it is a huge organisation. It is how we deal with issues as they arise that is important. We should be looking at ways to minimise problems but, because the NHS is a massive organisation that reaches into every area, every community and every family in Scotland, issues will always arise.

What is not helpful is the almost hysterical level of condemnation, attack and vilification poured on to the NHS by members of the Labour Party. While most Scots see the NHS as an institution to be treasured, respected and supported, Labour sees it as another opportunity to get a cheap shot in the press, to issue another overegged press release and to pile up one stoked-up crisis on top of another, thereby pouring scorn on the NHS and its workforce.

Rhoda Grant: I am listening to the member with awe and interest. How does he think that we are pouring scorn on the NHS? We are asking the Government to support the NHS, its workers and its patients so that we can all enjoy the services that we very much want. It is the neglect of Stuart McMillan's party's Government that has led to the problems that we are discussing.

Stuart McMillan: After the condemnation and vilification in the comments that it has put out over the past 24 hours and beyond, I think that the issuing of an apology would be a start for the Labour Party in proving that it likes the NHS.

To Labour members, the worry and concern that they are inflicting on NHS employees, volunteers and even patients are merely collateral damage as they seek to tarnish the NHS to get their spokespeople in prime slots on radio phone-ins, television programmes or breakfast news broadcasts. It is time that Labour stopped talking down the NHS in Scotland. After all, before 18 September 2014, did not Labour tell us that the NHS would be safe if Scotland voted no? It seems that we must now forget those Labour words.

The motion calls for

“a culture of transparency and openness with regular publication of statistics and reports”,

but it makes no mention of the costs of providing that information. Speaking from personal experience—when I worked in the private sector, one of my duties was to analyse statistics and produce regular reports—I know that that does not come with no cost attached. Staff time is needed to record information, compile statistics and produce reports, and there are the costs of publishing the information in either printed or electronic format.

I would hope that Labour politicians are well aware that their calls for increased information—even if it is already being collated—will result in additional costs. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could inform the Parliament who will bear the costs. Will it be ISD or the Government’s official statistics group?

I welcome the introduction of the weekly statistics. If it continues the excellent progress of information reporting from the SNP since we came to power, it will be an advantage. It will certainly be an advantage to the NHS and Scotland’s patients.

ISD Scotland already compiles a significant amount of NHS data, which can be accessed easily, but there are other methods. We are all MSPs, and there are other methods for us to obtain information. We can ask parliamentary questions, we can write letters to ministers or cabinet secretaries, and we can ask for meetings with them. We also have the option of using freedom of information requests to access further information. Perhaps some members will take a wee bit of advice on that. When someone submits an FOI request, it is usually helpful if they understand what they are asking for before they run to the press complaining that the information says something else.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Will you draw to a close, please?

Stuart McMillan: It seems strange that Labour politicians who have not got the hang of FOI requests and knowing what information they are after are now running around demanding more information. Do we have any guarantee that they will actually understand it when they receive it?

16:11

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): They say that the best line of defence is attack, and boy have we seen plenty of that from the SNP benches today. The first step in the ability to tackle a problem is to acknowledge that there is a problem. If we are going to sit in denial while there are issues that have to be addressed in the national health service, we will not make progress.

Joan McAlpine talked about record levels of consultants. The last time I checked, 37.7 consultant posts in Fife were not filled because the NHS was unable to fill them. Companies such as Medinet were flying up consultants from England at the weekends to do homers. I raised with the cabinet secretary’s predecessor, Alex Neil, specific cases where that went wrong. We have heard talk of record numbers, and we are seeing more nurses going into NHS Fife, which I have welcomed, but that is because we have highlighted the issues.

Before I came into this place, I spent two years as the leader of Fife Council, and during those two years I was consistent in raising my concerns about the assumptions that had been made through the previous right of Fife exercise, which put together how our hospitals would be co-ordinated and how health and social care would be run in Fife. Since I came into this place, I have consistently continued to raise those concerns because I regularly meet nurses and other staff in the hospitals and I see the pressures and challenges there. I met the cabinet secretary’s predecessor, Alex Neil, to discuss many of those issues, and I was grateful for the meeting with the cabinet secretary just last week or the week before.

I am also consistent in praising the hard work, care and commitment that certainly I and my family have seen at first hand from NHS staff in Fife. That is why I am so vocal on the issue—it is because I am so passionate about the national health service. It was the greatest creation of the previous century and we have a duty as politicians to ensure that it can move forward and be modernised to meet the needs of this century.

Last week, the Healthcare Environment Inspectorate published a report following an

unannounced visit that it carried out to the Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy. It states:

"In the majority of wards and units inspected, the standard of environmental cleanliness was good".

That is the starting point, because that is what we would expect within a hospital. However, it goes on to say that the accident and emergency department and ward 15, which is a care of the elderly ward, were exceptions. The report states that in those areas and in the intensive care unit there were "significant levels of dust". Concern was raised about the cleanliness of equipment. In accident and emergency, trolley frames were contaminated with blood and body fluids, and chairs, blood gas analysers and bed frames were contaminated in accident and emergency and the maternity ward.

I could go on, but the cabinet secretary has obviously read all this so I will not continue. The chief inspector said that the inspectorate was so disappointed that it raised its concerns with the Scottish Government. I do not want to read out every bit of the report, but when such issues are highlighted, surely we parliamentarians have a responsibility and a duty to come to the Parliament and raise them and any other issues of concern about the health service. That should not be seen as somehow attacking the health service or health staff: quite the reverse. We are on the side of the health service and health staff.

Shona Robison: I agree with that, but the member is the first speaker from the Labour Party to offer a balanced speech that recognises the good things that are happening as well as highlighting the difficult issues that have to be resolved. The difficulty that we have is that there is no balance from Labour in the main.

To reassure Alex Rowley about the report, the HEI will go back into that hospital and will make sure that those issues that are not good enough are resolved. I give him that assurance.

Alex Rowley: I thank the cabinet secretary for that. I have consistently called for a review of NHS Fife's ability to meet the health needs of people in Fife. A couple of weeks ago, there was a report in *The Courier* about accident and emergency waiting times. It compared Fife with Tayside. I cannot remember whether the report said that Tayside had no problems, but it certainly did not have a lot while NHS Fife had significant problems.

NHS Fife seems to have bounced from one issue to the next to the next, and I come back to the assumptions that were made when health services in Fife were reconfigured. Back in the 1980s, I was studying in this city when the Griffiths report, which meant the start of community care, came out. The Conservative Party, which was in

power at that time, commissioned that report. I remember making the point that community care would not be care on the cheap. It means major pressures on health and social care.

I appeal to the Government: let us work together. Let us not pretend that everything is rosy, nor attack everybody who tries to raise issues of concern. Let us be proud of our national health service and work together to build it so that we can be confident that it will deliver for all our citizens.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Richard Lyle. You have four minutes or thereby, please.

16:17

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I notice that everyone has taken two minutes off me.

The issues that face the national health service are indeed important. Despite the Labour motion trying to claim otherwise, the SNP Scottish Government is taking on board and addressing those issues. The SNP's vision for the NHS is that the NHS should remain a publicly-delivered service and as long as the SNP Government is in power, it will remain a publicly-delivered service. Unlike the Westminster Con-Dem Government that is marching the English NHS down the path of privatisation, the SNP has met its commitment to protect the NHS budget in order to facilitate its vision. The health resource budget for the year 2015-16 will be a record £12 billion.

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Richard Lyle: No, I do not have time.

The Scottish Government announced that an extra £65 million will be made available to the NHS this year. Those funds will help to alleviate some of the pressures and ensure that the NHS can continue to deliver and sustain care of all patients across Scotland. That is in spite of Westminster's 10 per cent cut in Scotland's fiscal resource budget since 2010. I hope that people remember that in May.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government has increased the health resource by 4.6 per cent in real terms, so it is putting its money where its mouth is. It is a pity that Westminster will not do the same.

Then, of course, we have those on the other side of the chamber in the Labour Party, a party that has a poor record in government and whose handling of the NHS leaves a lot to be desired. We only need to look south of the border at the only part of the UK where Labour is still in power: Wales. The Welsh Labour Party has a poor record of dealing with its national health service. Perhaps

Carwyn Jones has taken tips from the Labour Party in Scotland—who knows?

Jenny Marra's motion highlights an issue with transparency and goes so far as to say that there is a “veil of secrecy”. Is that the same veil that the Labour Party used during its term in government when it came to hidden waiting lists? The SNP Government abolished those—something that Labour failed to do for eight years despite acknowledging that they were not in the interests of patients.

The SNP Government acts in the best interests of patients—so much so that patients in Scotland have a high rate of satisfaction in the NHS and public confidence in looking after and protecting the NHS sits with the Scottish National Party and this Government. Under this Government, there has been a steady increase in the publication of statistics about the performance of the NHS. So, when I hear the Labour Party pontificate from on high, across the chamber, about our lack of transparency, I cannot but think of the hypocrisy that Labour members show, given that a record of openness was sorely lacking during Labour's administration of Scotland's NHS.

The NHS belongs to all our citizens, and any suggestions for improvements or views on how we can make it run better are always welcome. That is how this Government acts in all its areas of responsibility and it is, I am sure, how it will continue to do business. The national health service is close to all our hearts, which is why the SNP will never stop doing its best to make Scotland's NHS ever healthier.

I remember when the Labour Party threatened to close the A and E department at Monklands hospital and I remember the views of the community. It was the SNP Government that saved the A and E department at Monklands and protected it from closure, and it has continued with that service. Since then, hundreds of thousands of patients have been treated at Monklands hospital. Where would those patients have gone if not to Monklands? They would have swamped Wishaw hospital or Hairmyres hospital. That speaks volumes for our NHS and how we protect it.

As far as I am concerned, Presiding Officer, it is better to be with the SNP for our NHS.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I remind members who have taken part in the debate that we would be grateful for their presence in the chamber. I hope that those who are not here will return soon.

16:22

Jim Hume: As I mentioned in my opening speech, the Lib Dems have long called for the

weekly publication of A and E waiting times. We believe that such a move will make the system more transparent and that the Government will have nowhere to hide when things go wrong. I am pleased that that will happen, but we cannot sit back and expect more statistics to fix NHS issues. The Scottish Government has tough questions to tackle in creating a more effective A and E service. Ultimately, the NHS could be better supported by the Government in meeting waiting time targets and maintaining smoother patient pathways.

Christian Allard: I found the member's opening remarks about the cabinet secretary hiding behind figures strange. He talked about a wall of statistics, but is that not exactly what he is asking for?

Jim Hume: I was referring to the ISD figures that came out once a month on what we called superstats Tuesday. They were a pile of statistics like a wall and they were difficult to get through. Weekly reporting is exactly what we want.

MSPs across the chamber have acknowledged the need for more transparency. As we know from core health sector groups such as the BMA and the Royal College of Nursing, this is only the first step on the right path to a more efficient NHS. As members have noted, it has taken a U-turn to get here, and a welcome one at that. It was not the Government's previous position—the Government's position has changed in a short time. I repeat that the Government needs to adopt a policy of working openly across parties on important policy issues such as the NHS, and I am happy to work with it in that way.

Nonetheless, the focus of the Lib Dem amendment is on seeking assurances from the Scottish Government on how it plans to use the information. The goal is not to overwhelm the public, Parliament and health specialists with a flurry of information simply for the sake of obtaining it. We must remember that the ultimate goal is a transparent system in which ministers cannot hide behind the mountain of data that I referred to and in which problem areas in A and E departments are tackled head on through targeted support and resources for our NHS staff.

Relieving the A and E crisis that has developed is a complex task that involves taking into account a number of factors. We know that understaffing and underresourcing are a particular problem.

There have been repeated calls from doctors and nurses, who tell us that increases in A and E waiting times are a result of the compounding effects of pressures in other areas of the NHS. The British Medical Association has warned that

“we must avoid reducing the NHS as a whole to a set of weekly performance figures, skewing the public's

perception of the health service and ignoring the system-wide pressures which stretch far beyond A&E.”

The Lib Dems look to the cabinet secretary to spell out the measures that her Government will take in a bid to remedy the crisis in our A and E departments.

Keeping A and E units open is a move towards ensuring that communities have quicker access to care, but having the infrastructure without having the proper procedures, staff and resources is not sufficient. A case in point that has been mentioned several times is the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley. It is not enough for the Government to claim that it is doing something to address problems with A and E; it also needs to show what it is doing.

It is evident that, if we want to truly resolve the A and E issues, we need to ensure that the Scottish Government handles the released information in a way that brings tangible results. The Scottish Government must act on that task and not simply divert the public's attention by agreeing to publish information. We want the information to be used actively to develop flexibility in the NHS's resources, with primary input from the experts who deal with patients daily. Whether the issue is staff shortages or material or financial shortages that can be mitigated by better analysis of A and E cases, and whatever the needs of our invaluable NHS staff might be, the weekly information will be of little use or value if it is not properly used and applied to fix the root of the problems.

The Scottish Government can no longer hide behind the wall of stats that are released once a month. We need to see tangible measures to fix the problems in our NHS, and ministers must listen to what NHS staff, health professionals and patients are saying.

This should be a reminder to the Scottish Government that it needs to heed what those at the front line of the NHS are saying on the wider issue of sustainable staffing and resourcing in the long term. As we know, geriatric beds have been cut by a third since 2010; boarding numbers have soared to 3,000; our hospitals are bottlenecked; and in the past two years 16,500 NHS staff have been signed off work with mental health issues.

A and E weekly reporting is only one aspect. It is vital that the Scottish Government outlines the measures that it will take to target the pinch points that we know exist in some of our A and E departments. A long-term approach to staffing and resourcing has to be key to that. This is an opportunity to underline the need for the Scottish Government to look at the issues, and I look to the cabinet secretary for assurances in her summing-up speech that she will set out how she intends to tackle the issue head on. Patients and our

dedicated NHS staff deserve and expect nothing less.

16:27

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): In an afternoon of bloody fratricide as the two parties opposite took lumps out of each other, I thought, “What future for Great Britain were these two parties, desperate to form a coalition at Westminster after the May general election, ever to be allowed to do so?” Were that ghastly fate ever to transpire for the nation, I hope that, in the interests of the transparency that both parties have been so keen to promote this afternoon, they will agree today that they would allow the cameras to follow every step of the negotiations. What we saw was not a pretty sight.

I will start where Jenny Marra and the cabinet secretary began by joining in the congratulations that I think members on all sides of the chamber have given to our NHS staff for their heroic efforts over the winter. Of course, they will not be able to listen to our praise of them, because they will be running around harassed in wards, doing a job in the most trying circumstances.

In all my years in the Parliament, I have never thought of Dr Nanette Milne as an angry woman, but I have to say that, in her speech, she came the nearest to being angry that I have ever heard. The motion was a dispiriting one. This is the third health debate that we have had this year. Although the first was on a ghastly motion, the debate turned out to be slightly more constructive. The second debate was reasonably consensual, but I am afraid that this afternoon's debate reverted to being wholly unhelpful and deeply destructive.

It is not that the issue at the heart of Jenny Marra's motion is unimportant or that it is wrong to raise it. The fact is that she effectively raised the issue in a question to the First Minister on 5 February, to which the First Minister responded that she could

“tell the chamber ... that”

she had

“asked officials to look at the possibility of moving to weekly publication.”—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2015; c 20.]

To characterise that as some great culture of conspiracy to deny us information on the health service—when, as Nanette Milne has detailed, we have more information than we have ever had—is simply to perform the wrong service to the debate.

Under Jim Murphy, the Labour Party has launched into the air all manner of fireworks on health. We have had the mismanaged release this week. We had the nonsense of the mansion tax that will fund phantom nurses. We had the

redeployment of moneys into an illusory front-line fund. Today, we had the return of matron, when it was Labour that persuaded us to join a consensus on senior charge nursing, only for us to do so and find that matron is to be brought back. Labour demands an apology a week. I recall that, on 1 January, Jim Murphy asked for 10,000 apologies. After their spectacle, the Labour fireworks leave only the smell of sulphur, as fireworks always do.

There is a suspicion that, at Labour Party group meetings, Jenny Marra—who is keen, diligent and well briefed—is putting her hand up and saying, “We’ll have another debate on health.” Where are all the other Labour front benchers? Have they gone to roost? Are they hiding? The only thing that we seem to be doing is having a Labour Party debate on the NHS that has been wholly destructive, with one honourable exception, to which I will respond.

It is our responsibility to challenge the Government of the day, but we must challenge it to the benefit of the NHS and patients, not to the political advantage of any poll rating ahead of a general election or a Scottish election. Like her predecessor, Shona Robison has talked about arriving at a consensual approach.

Those in the older generation used to say of health that they had had a fright. Sometimes a fright became a shock, and sometimes a shock became a crisis. We have had lots of frights. The NHS is having more shocks more regularly than in the past. I hesitate to say yet that it is in a state of crisis, and I am not blaming SNP members because, although there are lots of occasions on which I have disagreed with them, they have done a lot of good work. However, we are at the point where, if we cannot arrive at a consensus soon on what the strategic way forward to create a sustainable NHS is, it will be too late and we will find ourselves in a crisis that would have been wholly avoidable if we had been prepared to rise to the challenge.

When will that consensus happen? Are we going to rule it out for 2015 because there is an election? Are we going to rule it out in 2016 because there is an election? Are we going to rule it out in 2017 because there is an election? Are we going to have to wait until 2018, when there is not an election, before we are prepared to have the courage to arrive at that consensus?

This is about more than just spending billions. In a slip of the tongue, Gil Paterson said that the SNP would spend an additional £380 billion this year on the NHS. Even if it did, I do not think that that would be enough, because this is about a culture, an attitude and a much more fundamental response to GP primary care, discharge, staffing levels, how we address the preventative agenda and the debate on alcohol that is required.

We are at a point where politicians collectively are on the verge of being held collectively in complete contempt on the NHS by people outside the chamber. Time is running out for us to arrive at the consensus that we have all agreed that we need and which Alex Rowley rather heroically addressed.

16:33

Shona Robison: One of the most notable things about the debate is how few Labour members have been here for most of the afternoon, including Jenny Marra for vast parts of it. I wonder whether that reveals an acknowledgement that this week has not been handled particularly well. I hope that Labour learns from that experience.

Alex Rowley was notable and stood out by giving a speech in a very different tone. I absolutely acknowledge that there are challenges with the NHS and that sometimes things do not go as we would want them to go. That will always be the case with an organisation of that size that treats so many people.

However, the issue is about balance. Alex Rowley presented a balanced view of the report on the Victoria hospital in Fife, but we do not hear that balanced view from the rest of the Labour Party; we hear only a negative view, with Labour using information to tell a certain story. Labour needs to take a long, hard look at itself in that regard.

I will turn to issues that various members raised. Jim Hume said that he hoped that we would not hide behind a load of figures after 3 March. We cannot win. On the one hand, we are criticised for not providing enough information and, in the same debate, we are criticised for providing too much. I assure him that we will put as much information as necessary on to the system. However, it is important that we ensure that it is usable by the public. We want the website to be usable by not only politicians but the public.

Jim Hume: I was making a point that Christian Allard made as well. Releasing the figures weekly will give all of us a chance to analyse them better than we have been able to under the present system, which has resulted in superstats Tuesday, when we have tried to get over a huge wall or mountain of figures.

Shona Robison: That is why NHS performs will tell the story about the performance of the NHS in a way that will be more accessible to the public.

Bob Doris reminded us that the SNP Government ended Labour’s hidden waiting lists. He also reminded us of the good story that there is to tell about the reduction in mortality statistics,

which is particularly notable in Glasgow. The Glasgow hospitals have performed extremely well.

Bob Doris talked about the fact that the Government established the Healthcare Environment Inspectorate. It goes into hospitals and produces reports that can make for uncomfortable reading, but that is the right thing to do because, if we do not know what the problems are, we cannot address them.

Rhoda Grant talked about a number of things that I will pick up on. She talked about births in Skye. There have been pressures there. The pressures on midwifery staffing because of illness have caused difficulties that have led to the service being suspended while those issues are resolved. However, it is important to note that the safety of mothers and babies was paramount, and I am sure that Rhoda Grant would not suggest that an unsafe service was provided. I know that the NHS board is working extremely hard to get the service back up and running. I hope that Rhoda Grant will give it her support in doing that.

Rhoda Grant talked about endoscopy in Skye. The new hospital will have new endoscopy services and facilities, but she failed even to welcome the announcement of the new hospital. That proves my point about the lack of balance in the Labour Party's narrative on the health service. There is another new hospital in Rhoda Grant's area, in Aviemore, but, again, there was no mention of that whatsoever. That leads us to suspect that Labour has one narrative, which is negative and never positive. Labour has been well and truly found out on that.

Neil Bibby raised a lot of questions that I am sure that he will appreciate that I will have to respond to in writing, given the detail that is required. He has a point about the Royal Alexandra hospital. Its space is tightly constricted, and we have to consider how we can improve the patient flow in the hospital. I assure him that the team that is in there is considering that extremely carefully. I will write to him with some of the detail.

Gil Paterson reminded us of the high levels of patient satisfaction, which we should welcome.

Christian Allard mentioned the visit that I made to Grampian on Monday, when I met the area partnership forum and the staff side. There is a culture of change in Grampian. While recognising that there is a road still to be travelled, the staff talked about a different culture—one of openness—and they are very much engaging in that process. I am optimistic about the progress that will be made in that health board area.

Anne McTaggart talked about transport issues. Transport issues have to be resolved at the new south Glasgow hospital, but the health board is only part of the solution. Glasgow City Council is

also a major part of it, but she did not talk about that. Again, there is a lack of balance when addressing issues that we must address.

Stuart McMillan asked about the costs and resources for the statistical analysis on the website. We are supporting ISD Scotland to do that and, of course, if any support is required beyond its current capability, we will consider that.

I have mentioned Alex Rowley. He came to see me to talk about local issues and I hope that he found that meeting as constructive as I did. The thing to remember is that the success of integration in Fife also relies on Fife Council playing its part. It is important to bear it in mind that, from 1 April, NHS Fife and Fife Council will be jointly responsible for many of the issues.

A lot has been said and some constructive points have been made. There has perhaps not been much consensus, but that is because of the tone and context of the motion. I am keen to bring debates to the Parliament and to build a consensus, but that has to be a two-way process; it cannot come just from the Government.

Labour has to take a long, hard look at itself after what has happened this week. If it is serious about being taken seriously on the NHS, it must change its tone, because it is not being taken seriously, not least by the staff in the NHS, who see it as negative, carping and having nothing positive to say about our health service. The one thing that is clear from the debate is that Labour has proven that sorry is the hardest word to say.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Dr Richard Simpson. Dr Simpson, you have until 4.43—almost 10 minutes.

16:42

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Did you say 4.43 pm or 4.53 pm?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is 4.53 pm. I will give you a little more.

Dr Simpson: I will try to hurry up, Presiding Officer.

In the past few months, we have seen a Government that is driven by the realisation that it needs to concentrate on a deteriorating NHS whose hardworking staff are very stressed, as Jackson Carlaw said. Thanks to our staff, progress has undoubtedly been made.

I did not get to intervene on Christian Allard, but I say to him that Audit Scotland calls NPD simply another form of public-private partnership, so he should be careful about what he says.

Planning well ahead is imperative. As Anne McTaggart said, the parking problem at the new

Southern general hospital mirrors the problems that we had at the Forth Valley royal hospital in Larbert, which were severe. Nurses complained to me bitterly that they felt unsafe going home at night. The Government has had five years planning the Southern general and parking should have been planned for—as, indeed, should the public transport, which has still not been approved.

Bruce Crawford: Will Richard Simpson give way?

Dr Simpson: I will not give way at the moment. Let me make a little progress.

Of course there has been progress since 1999 under Labour and the SNP. The HEI and HIS inspections of services for the elderly are welcome and, as Bob Doris said, the patient safety programme has made a big contribution to reducing mortality. I welcome all those things. We started the patient safety programme and the SNP has continued to develop it; it is excellent. We initiated the staff partnership system to which Shona Robison referred in her closing speech. The SNP has continued it and it has been applauded by the King's Fund as one of the best bits of practice in working with staff.

I have to say to the SNP that, if I had been making this speech in 2010, I might have been more laudatory but, since 2011, many elements have been going backwards. Multiple shocks, as Jackson Carlaw called them, are becoming more frequent. It might not yet be quite a crisis, but it is getting there. Actually, Stuart McMillan used the word "crisis" more than any of us, although it was in a different context.

Alex Rowley reminded us that the problem is not the staff but the Government's need to listen and not be in denial. One point of agreement that I have with Nanette Milne is that we cannot just consider one part of the system, such as the GP out-of-hours service; we need to consider the whole pathway.

There is a pattern to this Government's response to issues. First, it blames Labour and it blames us for raising the issues. Secondly, it is becoming adept at playing the whack-a-mole game, which I was not familiar with until my grandchildren told me about it. For those who are not aware of the game, moles pop up at random in a series of holes and have to be hit on the head with a mallet.

There are two aspects of the game that apply to this Government. As soon as it identifies a problem, it throws some money at it in the hope that it will disappear—£50 million for A and E, £40 million for GPs, £40 million for the new medicines fund, and money for delayed discharges. Then the Government turns around looking for applause

and for us all to admire its skill in whacking the mole.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Dr Simpson: Not at the moment, but I will later.

The second part of the game, which applies here and is the subject of the debate, is the apparently random nature of the appearance of those moles. The Government sometimes seems astonished that they deign to appear at all. However, the lack of information that the Government has portrayed is, of course, not entirely real, as we have found. That aspect falls into three parts: the first is the information that the Government has but has not given us—that applies to a number of issues; the second is the information that, once revealed, requires action; and finally there is the information that the Government does not have and does not really want to have, as it might provide a more unpalatable truth. Let us examine those in turn.

Labour knew that the boards reported weekly on accident and emergency waiting times. How did we know? We asked the boards in an FOI request and two boards—only two—were honest enough and open enough to provide us with a template of their weekly reports to the Government. It was only once that fact was uncovered, as Jim Hume said, that the Government agreed to publish the A and E figures—sorry, not the Government; the chief statistician.

We also know that the same weekly return includes delayed discharges figures because they were on the same template, so I welcome what I think was the cabinet secretary's announcement today—without waiting for the chief statistician—that she will indeed publish that information, since delayed discharges are one of her highest priorities.

Then there are the figures that are published sometimes quarterly, sometimes annually, or sometimes even longer in arrears. However, the Government often had that information long before the public. Let me illustrate. There were the problems such as Lanarkshire's hospital mortality record or the problems in Grampian. Once those statistics finally emerge, the Government says—

Christian Allard: Will the member give way?

Dr Simpson: No. I was not able to make an intervention when Mr Allard was speaking.

Once those statistics are finally published, the Government says, "Look, we have acted. We have sent in Healthcare Improvement Scotland," and then it wrings its hands and says, "We deplore what happened." Is that acceptable or not? It is unacceptable.

Shona Robison: Will Richard Simpson give way?

Dr Simpson: Yes, I will.

Shona Robison: I note that the animal rights people will no doubt be on Richard Simpson's back after his mole analogy.

On the one hand, Labour members come to the chamber time and again to demand that we take action on various things but, on the other hand, Richard Simpson seems to be criticising the fact that we gather information in order to be able to take action. Surely it is right that we take action when issues arise.

Dr Simpson: I thank the cabinet secretary for her intervention but she misses the point. I am saying that the information was available to the Government a long time before it was available to the public.

I welcome the suggestion in the SNP press release that it will look at reporting timeously—as has been confirmed by the cabinet secretary—on all the material that it receives. I ask the cabinet secretary to publish a list in the next 48 hours of all the data that the Government receives so that we can then judge that against her promise of openness and transparency.

There are times when the Government hoped that perhaps we would not notice the data, such as during the waiting times scandal, when the data showed such variation as to beggar belief. The Government delayed and obfuscated when I raised the issue, and it acted only when forced to do so by brave and determined whistleblowers.

Some data is never published and requires FOI requests. The cancelled operation data is one example. I raised that FOI request for one reason. A nurse approached me to say that one of her patients had his amputation operation cancelled within an hour of when he was due to go to surgery. That may have been for clinical reasons; it may have been for non-clinical reasons. However, I ask members to think for a minute about being faced with an operation involving the amputation of a limb, being prepared for surgery, and then, within one hour of going to surgery, being told, "No, you can't have that operation," and having to go home and wait for the next operation appointment.

Whether an operation is cancelled for clinical or non-clinical reasons—I do not really see what the difference is—it really is a problem, but now—

Christian Allard *rose*—

Shona Robison *rose*—

Dr Simpson: No, let me finish this bit, and then I will let you in, if I may. Now—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let the member finish.

Dr Simpson: Now, what did we learn? The Government, in rebutting our interpretations of the figures that we got on FOI, has actually produced all the figures for the last six weeks up to the middle of February. It had all that data; we did not. *[Interruption.]* Yes, members may groan and say "Oh!", but that is what this debate is about. It is about the revelation of information that the Government had under its hat and did not publish.

There seems to be a failure—

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

Dr Simpson: Very briefly.

Shona Robison: Richard Simpson should understand that there is a big difference between clinical and non-clinical reasons for cancelling operations. Clinical reasons are those that a doctor deems to be so, and to compare those statistics with English statistics that included only non-clinical reasons was absolutely a disgrace. Will you apologise for it?

Dr Simpson: If the cabinet secretary apologises for the fact that she has been hiding statistics. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A little bit of order, please.

Dr Simpson: We turn to the Royal Alexandra hospital, which Neil Bibby asked a series of pertinent questions on. I can tell the cabinet secretary that I talked to the staff there, and they told me that the consultants are having to act down in order to fill gaps in the middle-grade rotas. That is unsustainable and it was always unsustainable. It does not take putting in a support team to recognise it. The managers on the spot should have recognised it and recognised the pressure. If we had had the figures on the A and E problems at RAH on a weekly basis, we would have raised the issue sooner.

The fundamental problem, which I will finish on, is that we are in a situation in which there does not seem to be a complete realisation within the Government's health department that we have moved from a system in which we collect data and publish it in retrospective form to a situation in which we are in a new world of informatics in which there is real-time data.

As Jenny Marra said, the NHS ambulance service has recognised that, and it updates its website every 15 minutes. NHS 24 is pretty good about publishing its information timeously as well. However, we need to have a full review of what statistics are collected, how they are collected and

when they are published. Obviously there will be caveats for some of them—

Shona Robison: Oh really?

Dr Simpson: Yes. Nevertheless, information is needed. It is needed primarily by the clinicians to improve their outcomes, secondly by patients to see what is actually happening, as they are the ones who suffer when operations are cancelled, and thirdly by the politicians so that we can hold the Government to account. We are third in line. This is not about the Labour Party that has been attacked on the issue; this is about all of us raising issues that have been brought to us by patients, staff and the public.

I want to finish on a consensual note by welcoming the fact that we are going to have published statistics that are not just weekly but are also the most public statistics ever. If we get that—we will hold the Government to account on that statement—I welcome it. I have yet to see the proof of that pudding, however, and the Government's hiding of the delayed discharge information, even when it had announced the A and E issue, is an indication that it has not yet really got the message. I support Labour's motion.

Business Motions

16:53

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12331, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 February 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Legal Writings (Counterparts and Delivery) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Building Scotland's Infrastructure for the Future

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 February 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 February 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: New Psychoactive Substances in Scotland

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Commission on Local Tax Reform

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 3 March 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Welfare Funds (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 March 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Health, Wellbeing and Sport

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 March 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12332, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out the stage 2 timetable for the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 2 April 2015.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:54

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions.

I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-12334, on referral of a bill, and motions S4M-12335 and S4M-12336, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 9.7.1(b) that stage 2 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill be taken as follows:

- (a) the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee to consider (in the order set out by, or by virtue of, Rules 9.7.4 and 9.10.8):
 - (i) amendments to, and sections within, Part 4 (including any amendments inserting a new schedule to be introduced by Part 4), and
 - (ii) any amendments not falling within Part 4 (including amendments to Part 9, schedules 4 and 5 and the long title) that relate primarily to provisions within or introduced by Part 4 or that otherwise relate primarily to land reform,
- (b) the Local Government and Regeneration Committee to consider (in the order set out by, or by virtue of, Rules 9.7.4 and 9.10.8):
 - (i) amendments to Parts 1 to 3, Parts 5 to 8 and schedules 1 to 3; sections within those Parts, and schedules 1 to 3,
 - (ii) any amendments not falling within those Parts and schedules (including amendments to Part 9, schedules 4 and 5 and the long title), other than those to be considered by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, and
 - (iii) sections within Part 9; schedules 4 and 5, and the long title (consideration of any provision mentioned in this sub-paragraph to be completed only after the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has completed consideration of any amendments to that provision that fall to be considered by it);

with amendments to be considered by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee being numbered in a sequence starting with 1 and amendments to be considered by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee to be numbered in a sequence starting with 1001, each sequence being published separately.

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Specification of Public Authorities) (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Land and Building Transaction Tax (Addition and Modification of Reliefs) (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

The Presiding Officer: I call on Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-12337, on approval of the Scottish regulators' strategic code of practice.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Regulators' Strategic Code of Practice be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: Patrick Harvie has indicated that he wishes to speak against the motion. You have up to three minutes, Mr Harvie.

16:55

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will try to be briefer than that.

Back in 2013, when the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill, as it was then, was being scrutinised, my colleague Alison Johnstone was a member of the lead committee, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. She consistently advanced the argument that it is inappropriate to make central to the role of regulators, including environmental regulators, what I have come to regard as the Government's central contradiction, which is sustainable economic growth. A regulator's duty is to consider what it has been charged with regulating and not to advance the Government's economic policy for it.

Alison Johnstone advanced that argument in relation to the bill. Given that the Government has proceeded with that course of action, we have advanced the argument again in relation to the strategic code of practice. The first version of the code was presented to the committee on 3 December last year. Having resumed my seat on the committee by that point, I actually welcomed that first version. I was all set—I was ready, geared and primed—to congratulate Fergus Ewing on having understood some of the arguments that had been advanced.

Paragraph 9 of the first version of the code made it clear that

"The duties to have regard to the Code in determining and applying general policies or principles do not apply to the exercise by a regulator or its staff of any specified regulatory function in individual cases."

I was looking forward to the opportunity to congratulate the minister on understanding some of the arguments that had been advanced, so I was disappointed that he immediately withdrew it and promised to bring back a worse version.

Mr Ewing has now done that, and the new version makes it clear that the code applies in exercising regulatory functions. Under questioning at the committee, it seemed clear that the intention was a complete reversal from the first version of the code as presented back in December, which I would have welcomed.

I will not rehearse the whole argument on the bill but, for those reasons, the Greens will not support the code of practice. I urge the Government to recognise that its economic policy, whether or not I agree with it, should not be the central function of regulators. They have their own job to do, and advancing the Government's economic policy is not it.

16:58

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Patrick Harvie is right that he has made those arguments before. He has made them on many previous occasions, so I suppose that this is a kind of parliamentary version of "Groundhog Day".

Let us cut straight to the chase. The definition of sustainable economic growth that is contained in the code is as follows:

"Sustainable economic growth means building a dynamic and growing economy that will provide prosperity and opportunities for all, while ensuring that future generations can enjoy a better quality of life too."

Whatever party members are in, it seems to me that we are all able to unite behind that as a fairly simple and desirable aim for society.

Of course, economic growth is somewhat better than economic contraction, especially from the point of view of people who currently face losing their jobs. As the minister for business, I know that, sadly, there are all too many businesses in my constituency and others in which people face the real threat of losing their job and redundancy. If there is economic growth, and it delivers opportunities for new work, new business and new employment, that will create opportunities for people to get back into work, to get the self-respect of work and to look after their families properly.

I make no apology for saying that the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 and the code, which I hope we will pass today with the support of all the other parties that were broadly in favour of the measures in the bill, will make a modest contribution. What it will not do—which Patrick Harvie failed to mention—is supplant the primary duties of regulators. They are not supplanted by this code of practice: the legislation makes it absolutely clear that that is so.

The code was developed with and by regulators and business, and it was subject to open, public consultation. The correction to it—this is my last point—was made as a result of the diligence of Nigel Don and the members of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee, who spotted an error to the effect that the general duty set out in the bill was not to be applied in practice. Surely if Parliament sets out a general duty, it is utterly

illogical to have a code that disappplies the principle that Parliament has accepted. I would have thought that Patrick Harvie, as a democrat, would recognise that that would be a parliamentary absurdity.

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on protecting Scotland's communities, if the amendment in the name of Shona Robison is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jackson Carlaw falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-12325.3, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12325, in the name of Jenny Marra, on protecting Scotland's communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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

Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (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)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 35, Abstentions 14.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Jackson Carlaw falls.

The next question is, that amendment S4M-12325.1, in the name of Jim Hume, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12325, in the name of Jenny Marra, on protecting Scotland's communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (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)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)

Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 35, Against 66, Abstentions 14.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12325, in the name of Jenny Marra, on protecting Scotland's communities, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, 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)
 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

Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 80, Against 35, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament thanks the staff of the NHS for their hard work during the challenging winter period; notes that in recent years there has been a progressive increase in the statistics available on the performance of NHS Scotland; welcomes that, from 3 March 2015, weekly A&E performance statistics will be published on the website, NHS Performs, and that NHS Scotland's Information Services Division will also be identifying how it can further enhance the accessibility of NHS performance statistics in consultation with the users of statistics and the wider public, and strongly condemns the recent misrepresentation of information on NHS performance, which devalues the work of Scotland's health service.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12334, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on referral of a bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees under Rule 9.7.1(b) that stage 2 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill be taken as follows:

- (a) the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee to consider (in the order set out by, or by virtue of, Rules 9.7.4 and 9.10.8):
 - (i) amendments to, and sections within, Part 4 (including any amendments inserting a new schedule to be introduced by Part 4), and
 - (ii) any amendments not falling within Part 4 (including amendments to Part 9, schedules 4 and 5 and the long title) that relate primarily to provisions within or introduced by Part 4 or that otherwise relate primarily to land reform,
- (b) the Local Government and Regeneration Committee to consider (in the order set out by, or by virtue of, Rules 9.7.4 and 9.10.8):
 - (i) amendments to Parts 1 to 3, Parts 5 to 8 and schedules 1 to 3; sections within those Parts, and schedules 1 to 3,
 - (ii) any amendments not falling within those Parts and schedules (including amendments to Part 9, schedules 4 and 5 and the long title), other than those to be considered by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, and
 - (iii) sections within Part 9; schedules 4 and 5, and the long title (consideration of any provision mentioned in this sub-paragraph to be completed only after the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has completed consideration of any amendments to that provision that fall to be considered by it);

with amendments to be considered by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee being numbered in a sequence starting with 1 and amendments to be considered by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee to be numbered in a sequence starting with 1001, each sequence being published separately.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12335, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument on the Equality Act 2010, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Equality Act 2010 (Specification of Public Authorities) (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12336, in the name of Joe Fitzpatrick, on approval of an SSI on the land and buildings transaction tax, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Addition and Modification of Reliefs) (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12337, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of the Scottish regulators' strategic code of practice, 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)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 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

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 112, Against 3, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Regulators' Strategic Code of Practice be approved.

Wave Energy Sector

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12218, in the name of Liam McArthur, on the wave energy sector in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament deeply regrets the recent announcement by Pelamis that it has gone into administration and confirmation from Aquamarine Power that it is significantly scaling back operations; understands that these companies were responsible for delivering a number of world firsts and world-only successes in the development of wave energy; believes that, despite these serious setbacks, the wave energy sector in Scotland has an important contribution to make in creating the renewable technology mix that will be necessary to decarbonise Scotland's energy system and meet its climate change targets; further believes that, with massive wave resources, notably in the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters, a world-leading skills base and the European Marine Energy Centre in Stromness in Orkney, the sector remains well-placed to successfully deploy wave technology on a commercial scale; looks forward to the role, objectives and budget of Wave Energy Scotland (WES) being clarified in the near future; recognises what it considers the risks attached to ongoing delay in WES taking on its new role, including the loss of expertise and momentum, and restates its support for the development of a wave energy sector in Scotland that can help deliver high quality jobs in communities across Scotland, particularly in the islands.

17:08

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): In time-honoured fashion, I start by thanking all members who signed the motion and especially those who have made time to participate in the debate. I very much look forward to their speeches and that of the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism. Although such gratitude is customary, it is genuinely heartfelt in this instance, because it has made possible a parliamentary debate on the future of the wave energy sector in Scotland, such as has been conspicuously absent in the three months since Pelamis Wave Power went into administration.

I acknowledge that the minister and the Deputy First Minister have responded to questions in the chamber, and I am particularly grateful to Mr Ewing for agreeing to meet privately with me and other members who have an interest in the issue to discuss our concerns in more detail. Nevertheless, I still believe that this Parliament has been ill served by being denied a proper debate on the issue before now; that would have been inconceivable if it had been the United Kingdom Government rather than the Scottish Government that was responsible for withdrawing the loan facility from Pelamis.

This debate matters because it provides an opportunity for Parliament to restate in unambiguous terms our support for the wave energy sector, to acknowledge the significant achievements that it has already secured and to reiterate our collective confidence in the contribution that renewable energy still has to make to our renewables future.

That is not to diminish or gloss over the problems that the sector faces. In some senses, they provide a sobering reminder—if any were needed—that the situation is not easy and that if it had been we would have cracked it some time ago. However, in the face of those who appear to want to read wave energy its last rites or who delight in saying “I told you so”, it is vital that this and future Parliaments and this and future Governments absolutely stay the course.

There is every reason for doing so. We should draw confidence from the world firsts and the world onlies that Pelamis, Aquamarine Power and other companies have achieved in a remarkably short period; from the world-leading skills and expertise that we have in our research and in our company base, not to mention the test facilities at the European Marine Energy Centre in my constituency; and from the abundant natural resources around our shores.

These are difficult and uncertain times for all who are involved in the sector, but now more than ever we need to signal our continued support and our willingness to be brave. For those who have already lost their jobs, of course, such support will come too late. For example, I know that many former Pelamis staff feel aggrieved by what has happened. The speed at which decisions were taken, the lack of consultation and the loss of earnings due have all left a bitter taste. One constituent wrote to me recently saying:

“I came back to Orkney with a young family and now face having to relocate. If I do, I doubt I will return.”

He went on to say that

“all responses to redundancy stated we would be supported by PACE. This hasn't happened.”

That is troubling for a number of reasons beyond the obvious personal tragedy of a lost job and, possibly, career. It raises concerns, for example, about the ability of the sector to attract the sort of people whom it will in the future need to make it a success.

That is just one of the very many challenges that face the new body, wave energy Scotland. How will it replicate the sort of mission and vision that enabled Pelamis and other companies to persuade talented individuals with a range of skills to commit their futures to building a new industry? As I have said before, in the circumstances I entirely welcome the establishment of WES. There

may be questions about why it was not brought into being prior to the demise of Pelamis in order to allow for a more managed transition. Nevertheless, it is to the future that we must all now look.

To that end, Scottish Renewables argues that WES

“provides an opportunity to start afresh, moving away from company focused and array driven funding models”,

and provides an approach to research and development that

“avoids duplication of effort on common challenges.”

That makes sense, although I would be worried if it were to herald a complete retreat back to the labs. Getting machines wet in the sort of environment that is provided by EMEC is where the greatest amount of learning takes place. If we lose sight of that, the risk is that we will take two steps back but then fail to take the requisite number of steps forward.

In that context, I believe that the decision to locate WES in Inverness is short-sighted. Orkney has been, and must remain, in the vanguard of our efforts to deliver a wave energy industry and it is therefore the logical place for WES to be based. Doing anything else sends entirely the wrong signal about how serious we are. I realise that we are not talking about large numbers of jobs, but to do that is to miss the point.

How serious we are will obviously be judged by the objectives that are set for WES and—just as important—the budget that is attached to meeting those objectives. Clarity on both is needed without delay—that is a key message from all those who have an interest in the sector. We need WES to be brave, but we need ministers to be brave, as well. A former engineer with Aquamarine Power explained to me recently that there is no point in spending little pots of money here and there and expecting much to change. To do so, he argued, would be self-deluding and unjustifiable, given all the other demands on public funding at this time.

If we are serious about making this development happen, we need to acknowledge what it is going to take and not pretend otherwise. We should bear in mind, however, that for every £1 of public funding, developers have been able to lever in £6 of private investment. Bravery, vision and commitment must also be demonstrated by the incoming UK Government after May's election. Some of the statements that are being made about the future of renewables, including marine renewables, by those who could have a say in the make-up of the next UK Administration are truly alarming. I argue that retaining a Liberal Democrat influence post May is the surest antidote to some of the nonsense that is being spoken, but it is

important that we build the broadest possible political consensus.

That, in turn, needs to translate into genuinely collaborative working between both of Scotland's Governments. The challenges that face the wave energy sector are substantial enough without layering on political uncertainty or treating the future of the sector as a pawn in some wider political game. I am clear that an obvious and early priority for that joint working is delivery of grid connections to our islands. Again, that is something on which we have established consensus in the Scottish Parliament; I hope that that can continue, reflecting the fact that our islands are crucial if Scotland and the UK are to achieve their respective renewables and climate change targets.

I will return to where I started. This debate, and the support that we collectively reiterate for the wave energy sector, are important. After all, the sector plays to our competitive strengths—our natural resources and our research and industrial skills as the established world leader in the area. It provides an opportunity to create jobs and wealth, including in communities such as the one that I represent. The export opportunities for equipment and services are potentially enormous, which makes a case for wave energy to be treated as a technology and export opportunity rather than simply as a source of clean electricity. However, wave energy is, of course, a source of clean electricity. If we are to meet our challenging climate change targets—we have not done so yet—wave energy will need to be part of the mix.

The debate is long overdue, but I am pleased to have been allowed to make it happen. I look forward to hearing what colleagues and the minister have to say. I hope that we can send out a strong, decisive and unambiguous message from this Parliament about our collective determination to stay the course.

17:15

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I apologise to the minister and Liam McArthur, because I will leave for other business before the debate's close. I congratulate Liam McArthur on, and thank him for, securing this important debate.

Last week, I was in Saudi Arabia as a member of an Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee delegation, which was looking at the export opportunities for Scottish energy companies in that oil-rich country. I was inevitably reminded of Alex Salmond's description of Scotland as the

"Saudi Arabia of... marine energy."

In truth, I am sorry to report, it is hard to imagine a greater contrast between the king of crude in the Arabian desert and the parts of Scotland where the natural resource for our marine energy potential lies. Nonetheless, that potential is real, and Liam McArthur was absolutely right to say that it is important to emphasise that in addressing some of the issues that have arisen recently.

Rather than suppose that all we need to do is install the technology for the energy benefits to flow, recent events should focus our efforts on how to take forward all the potential technologies from the research and development stage to the point at which there is a prospect of successful commercialisation at scale.

Pelamis is going into administration and Aquamarine Power is to "significantly downsize" its business. Those are self-evidently disappointing outcomes at this stage for the wave power sector but, as has been said, those developments need not mark the end of the road.

We need to acknowledge the extent to which those two companies have carried the expectations of the Scottish Government for successful wave power development. Between them, they have received nearly £6 million in funding from the marine renewables commercialisation fund and they account for more than £11 million, or 44 per cent, of the fossil-fuel moneys that have been allocated from the renewable energy investment fund from March 2012 to October 2014. Therefore, the setbacks to the firms are setbacks to the sector as a whole and to the Scottish Government's investment priorities for the sector, as laid out to the end of last year.

It is therefore all the more important to understand as early as possible how the Government intends to deliver on its plan B—the setting up of wave energy Scotland. I hope that the minister will be able to say more about the new agency's budget, its staffing and when it will publish its business plan. Above all, we need a frank assessment of what recent developments mean for the future of the sector nationally and for particular parts of Scotland.

Members, as Liam McArthur did, will rightly emphasise the impact of the developments on local areas, whether they be the centres of natural resources in the Highlands and Islands or the places where wave power companies have developed, including Malcolm Chisholm's Edinburgh Northern and Leith constituency.

I want to emphasise the importance of the sector in Aberdeen and the north-east because of the potential for oil and gas service and support companies to diversify into offshore renewable energy development. The Aberdeen Renewable

Energy Group lists 70 companies and institutions in its area with an interest in marine renewables—from the University of Aberdeen and the Robert Gordon University, with their focus on research and development, to engineering companies like the Balmoral Group, which supplies component parts. RGU has an ocean-wave tank, which allows new technologies to be tested. Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group is leading the way in offshore wind development, with its plans for an offshore wind testing and demonstration centre in Aberdeen bay, but it recognises the potential to go beyond that and to explore marine energy, too.

I hope that the minister will have words of encouragement for the sector. However, diversifying Scotland's energy economy will take more than wishful thinking: it will take a serious commitment to addressing the obstacles to commercialisation, which have been highlighted in the past few weeks, and it will take a clear business plan for wave energy Scotland to get us back into play over the next few years.

17:19

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing the debate, which is very important for his constituency of Orkney because, without any doubt, Orkney is the world leader in the marine renewable technologies of wave and tidal power. The debate is also very important for Scotland, because we have 10 per cent of Europe's wave energy potential and 25 per cent of Europe's tidal energy potential. It is very important for the UK, too, because Scotland's wave and tidal energy can help keep the lights on in England as well as make a significant contribution to meeting the UK's climate change targets.

The benefits are not just about decarbonising our energy supply and meeting climate change targets; there are huge socioeconomic benefits to be gained, not least for Scotland's islands. The Scottish islands renewables project report, which was jointly commissioned by the UK and Scottish Governments and published in 2013, suggested that the total resource across Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles was equivalent to 20 per cent of the UK's electricity requirement. It suggested that 10,000 jobs could be created on those islands by 2030, and that a further 29,000 jobs could be created across the UK.

After generations of socioeconomic decline, the waves and tides around our islands represent the biggest opportunity that our islands have ever had. As if that was not enough reason to develop such technologies, Scottish Renewables estimates that there is a world market for wave and tidal technology that is worth £460 billion.

The European Marine Energy Centre at Stromness on Orkney is 10 years ahead of the rest of the world in wave and tidal research. The fact that Scotland has proven expertise in marine engineering is amply demonstrated—as Lewis Macdonald suggested—in our oil and gas sector, in which the sums generated from supply-chain exports now exceed the amounts that are earned in the UK continental shelf. We can do exactly the same in marine renewables.

It therefore astonishes me that the UK Government would turn its back on those opportunities, as it has done in its recent energy market reform bill. It astonishes me that it should fail to provide—as Liam McArthur acknowledged—interconnectors to our islands after more than a decade of prevarication. It also astonishes me that it should penalise Scottish generators with punitive transmission charges, as we have heard this week in the debacle over Longannet.

We should be in no doubt that it is not a lack of technological progress that has deterred investors; it is the failure of the UK Government to support this vital industry that has led to the liquidation of Pelamis and the loss of jobs at Aquamarine, just as it was the UK Government's failure to provide the long overdue interconnector that led to Seatricity relocating from Orkney to Cornwall.

If Liam McArthur wants to point the finger of blame, he should point it at his Tory friends at Westminster, because everyone throughout the renewables industry in Scotland knows where the blame lies, just as everyone throughout the renewables industry in Scotland knows that the Scottish Government—Mr Ewing, in particular—has done everything possible and will continue to do everything possible to support our renewables industry. However, if the UK Government should decide to support Scotland's wave sector and to put some hard cash on the table, I will be the first person to welcome that; indeed, I may even apologise.

17:24

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate, and I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing time for us to consider such an important issue. It is especially important to Orkney, Caithness and Sutherland and the Highlands and Islands more generally.

We live in a time in which energy security is becoming more and more important. Wave energy is an exciting way of generating power, but it is by no means new. The idea of converting one of the great forces of nature into electricity has been around since 1799, when the first known patent was filed in Paris, if not before.

The Scottish Conservatives have for a long time been—and we fully remain—highly supportive of this technology. If we want to avert the consequences of climate change, we must cut down on our carbon dioxide emissions, and wave power can play an important part in our doing so. Future energy supply must stand firmly on a base of safe and efficient nuclear power whilst also harnessing the awesome power of mother nature in terms of wave, wind, hydro, tidal and solar power. Scotland is well placed for renewables and should therefore take a lead in all those fields—they are such opportunities for new employment and incomes in Orkney and Caithness and Sutherland in particular.

Wave power remains one of the forces of nature that has so far not been tamed, but it remains an obvious provider if it is used in a responsible and economically viable way. It is therefore regrettable that Pelamis Wave Power has gone into administration and Aquamarine Power has been forced to downsize. Support is needed for wave power during this critical period, so that we can create an environment where collaborative research and development can flourish, in order to achieve a breakthrough for the industry.

The industry is calling loudly for collaboration, so the answer must be for scientists and the wave power industry to work together to achieve not only a concept but a commercially viable product to generate electricity around the UK coast, and particularly in the Pentland Firth, which has often been described as the Rolls-Royce of renewables. I think that Mr Salmond once said that. The Scottish Government's wave energy Scotland initiative might be able to deliver that, but it is essential that we take advantage of the financing and expertise of the UK as a whole. We have in the past shown that, when we work together as one, great things can be achieved.

One example of how wave power is already working can be found in Argyll and Bute, on Islay, where the land-installed marine power energy transmitter—LIMPET—has been operational since 2000. It is the world's first commercial wave power generator. It produces only 250KW, but it is important that now, 15 years later, we look back and see what lessons can be learned for the future.

Islay is also the location for a significant tidal power development, which is another promising technology with a guaranteed power source four times every 24 hours. I note that the people on Luing are calling for a fixed link to the mainland for the island and are suggesting housing a tidal generator as well. The idea must be good if it can work in practice.

Wave power is another avenue that we must explore in order to deal with our carbon legacy,

and Scotland is an ideal place to harness the power of the waves. It is surely a question of hurrying the technology forward to achieve that, and I ask the minister what will now be done to achieve that aim. Recent developments have—obviously—not been too encouraging. However, it cannot be impossible, with collaboration, to ensure that the technology becomes viable. A pan-UK approach to wave power should be adopted, drawing on the pool of expertise and funding that is available to us. If we work together as we have done in the past, commercially viable wave power will surely become a reality.

17:28

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing the debate. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the importance of wave power to both Scotland's economy and our ambitious targets for renewable energy and carbon reduction. Investment in this key growth sector is of national importance, and I hope that, in discussing the way forward today, we can find a shared agenda to support it through current difficulties.

Even this month, there have been a number of fairly damaging developments as a result of the Pelamis power firm closure in my constituency and in Orkney. Only a few weeks ago, the Swedish utility company Vattenfall announced that Aegir Wave Power, a joint venture with Pelamis, was being liquidated and, as a result, a large project near the Shetland islands was being cancelled.

The Pelamis closure occurred as a result of a failure to secure development funding, which is a huge disappointment, not only for the individuals who worked there but for the whole Leith community. This was a key employer for Leith and it was with great sadness that we learned the news of its closure at the end of last year.

Pelamis was an exceptional firm. As its website stated, it was

"the world's most advanced wave energy technology company".

It was the world's first wave energy company to deliver electricity from offshore wave power to the national grid. It also succeeded in securing the first export order for a wave energy device in Scotland. As the blog site Common Space asks:

"How could a company with such award-winning credibility backed by government investment, in an industry that is estimated to be worth a potential £4.5bn by 2030, collapse so quickly?"

The situation around the demise of Pelamis is not entirely clear but the Government tells us that European Union state rules dictate that the necessary development had to, in part, come from private investment and we know that that was not

forthcoming. When it could not be secured, a vital part of our local and national infrastructure was lost.

It is worth saying that state aid rules are notoriously complex and I would like to ask the Government whether the EU Commission was consulted about this aspect of those rules. I know that the employees and their families were distraught and many of them contacted me to share their great sadness and distress at what had happened and to ask certain questions. One question that has been asked was: how could the funding have stopped so abruptly? The result of that was a forced administration and quick dismissal of the staff within a few days.

I understand that the fear of an overseas investor might have influenced the Scottish Government but could it have done more to champion another bidder? Again, that is a question that has been put to me so I am putting it to the minister.

Finally, were there other bidders that the Scottish Government outbid? There is a certain amount of uncertainty about the whole situation, so any light that the minister can throw on it would be welcome.

I have only one minute left to look to the future and that is clearly what we have to focus on. We all welcome the creation of wave energy Scotland and we hope that it can take over a lot of the expertise, including from Pelamis, that would otherwise be lost. As the motion says, there is a risk in delay and the Scottish Government urgently needs to act and to clarify details of the business plan for wave energy Scotland. We all think that this is a good way forward in principle: seeking to retain intellectual property, enabling technology to reach commercial readiness, encouraging collaboration and fostering standardisation and a design consensus that will provide a platform for the commercialisation of the industry. In principle, wave energy Scotland is a good development but we certainly hope that it takes over its new role quickly.

It is right to say that the UK Government also has some responsibility for the situation. It should certainly take meaningful steps to adjust the electricity market framework to provide greater support to the wave energy sector. I hope that the two Governments can collaborate to make sure that Scotland will still become the leader in the development of wave energy.

17:32

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): It is clear that we agree that we need to fight for this industry and for its massive jobs and export potential. It is incredibly frustrating to see Pelamis and

Aquamarine Power's world-leading progress stumble. I have met, spoken with and received emails from constituents who are ex-employees of those companies and who desperately want to see wave energy become a Scottish success story, but who lost their jobs at the end of last year. They were devastated; not only had they lost their jobs, they had lost them in an industry that they had worked in, helped to develop and passionately believe in. So I welcome today's debate and thank Liam McArthur for bringing it to the chamber.

The Government's response to this serious break in wave energy progress has been to bring forward wave energy Scotland. I am pleased that it was successful in acquiring the intellectual property and other assets of Pelamis but, as the motion says, I hope that the minister can outline more details on the budget and the likely operation of wave energy Scotland. I know that the minister and Alex Paterson met industry representatives last month and I hope that he can tell us how the discussion is progressing.

It is clear that new technologies need patient capital funding. The long-term nature of the investment that is required is at odds with the demands of shareholders who look for short-term profits, but it is vital that we support this sector. It has, after all, attracted £70 million in contributions to the Scottish economy. During the past two decades, Scotland and the rest of the UK have lost out on a domestic supply chain for wind power. In contrast, the Danish Government invested £800 million over a 20-year period and made Denmark into the place we now import our turbines from.

From speaking to staff from Pelamis and Aquamarine Power in recent weeks, it is clear to me that they believe that wave power in Scotland is technically better placed than ever. We really do not want to be buying back this technology in a decade's time because of a lack of commitment or foresight.

There are a good handful of on-going projects and companies working in Scotland to harness the sea's power. Sadly, we can add Aegir to those that we have to say farewell to, but the opportunity is still there to make wave and tidal power a success. I hope that the Government will look at how it can harness the subsea skills of the oil and gas industry and add them to those of the engineers who are already working in wave power.

I ask the minister how much contact has been made with the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult. It is headquartered in Glasgow and appears to have very similar objectives to wave energy Scotland, albeit for the wider offshore energy sector. Are Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the catapult centre collaborating?

We all agree that some of the support for wave energy must come from the UK. The energy market reform process has been traumatic for many and high transmission charges remain a problem. Instead of hearing our First Minister call for more tax cuts for fossil fuels—personally, I thought that we were beyond that—I would like to hear more calls for a fair transition to offshore renewables as a key demand.

Scottish companies took this technology out of the lab and into the open ocean, but some of those talented engineers are now working in the same industry overseas, in countries where the technology is lagging behind APL and Pelamis. With on-going investment by their Governments, those countries will catch up; therefore, we must do all that we can and work tirelessly to maintain our global lead. We have developed the technology and it is essential that we fully benefit from its commercialisation. We will benefit environmentally and socially, and we know that there are potentially tens of thousands of jobs in the industry as well as billions of pounds in exports.

I know that we will continue to work together, but I ask the Government to champion the industry. We really do need to make sure that the UK Government is in no doubt of the strength of Scottish feeling about the issue.

17:37

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I thank Liam McArthur for bringing the matter to the chamber for debate. I genuinely welcome the fact that we can have a proper debate here. We rightly had fairly detailed parliamentary consideration of the matter when I brought it to Parliament at the earliest opportunity during topical questions on 25 November, but that is no substitute for a debate. Today, we have had that debate and I thank all members who have participated in it.

There has been welcome consensus on the support that exists for the principle of wave energy and its potential for Scotland, and the on desire that we should continue to play a leading role in developing wave energy here and for the world. We all agree about that. I have endeavoured to provide the face-to-face briefings for members to which Liam McArthur alluded. I also met Malcolm Chisholm in November and Alison Johnstone on 15 January, and my door is open for further meetings.

Many members have alluded to the success that Pelamis achieved because of the skills, expertise, determination and commitment of its employees, to whom I pay tribute. Reference has been made to the sadness, anger, bitterness and

disappointment that many must have felt in the circumstances of the termination of the company's existence. I understand that and I share those people's concerns, as does Scottish Renewables in its briefing for the debate. Many members have spoken eloquently on the subject. There is no easy part of being made redundant; sadly, many people in Scotland face that situation across a range of businesses. Given my responsibility as minister for business, I am acutely aware of that.

The two Pelamis P2 devices that were deployed at EMEC together had more than 11,800 total hours of grid-connected operation. It is important that I say that to inform people who read the *Official Report* of the debate not only that there is cross-party consensus about the principle but that, in practice, Pelamis delivered a substantial amount of electricity to the grid. I am told that the longest continuous period for which the devices generated electricity was 19.5 days.

The challenges of operating in the marine environment are known to all members. I am no expert, but I understand that the main challenges that face the developers of devices are reliability, survivability and installability, and I have spent a lot of time discussing issues such as power take-off with industry experts not just from Pelamis, but from Aquamarine Power, Albatern, AWS Ocean Energy and other companies. Prior to deciding WES's shape, form, objectives, funding and the roles that it should fulfil, I have made it my business to have detailed discussions with many of the industry's leading players. Indeed, Alison Johnstone alluded to the lengthy meeting that we had at St Andrew's house, which was followed by a dinner with many of the leading players.

The purpose of that engagement and the more substantial work that Highlands and Islands Enterprise is taking forward is to ensure that WES is set up in the right way. Many members have asked for specific details of WES, so I look forward to giving Parliament details of its budget, business plan and programme of activity on Wednesday 25 February via an appropriate parliamentary channel. I will ensure that all members are appropriately informed. I am not saying that there will be a parliamentary statement; however, I think that members want details, so I will provide them. Whether I do so through a question or otherwise has yet to be determined, but I want to tell members that we are nearly in a position to give them the information that they have quite fairly and reasonably asked for. I will follow that with an address to the wider investment community at the RenewableUK wave and tidal conference, which is taking place in Edinburgh on the same day, but I make it clear that Parliament will be informed first.

Questions about funding have quite rightly been raised. I am advised that Pelamis received about

£95 million, £70 million of which was contributed by the private sector. The positive point that is to be made is that private sector investment was attracted; there were a number of private sector investors, and they contributed most of the money. There are detractors of wave energy—their voices have not been heard in this debate, but they are out there—and in response to them, I point out that private sector investors put £70 million into the technology and that through the skills of the individuals involved electricity was successfully generated. I have a breakdown of the funding with me, and I can tell members that the public funding came to about £25 million.

The difficulty that arose is well known. Sadly, there was no prospect of further commercial investment. I assure all members that the Scottish Government and the enterprise network spent a considerable amount of time and effort on potential options, but the stark reality was that once the last private sector investment had been withdrawn it did not seem possible for the Scottish Government to shoulder the total burden of the funding that would, according to experts, have been required to take Pelamis forward. There is no easy way to say that, but that is the truth of the matter. It is important that I am as candid and as straightforward as I generally try to be in my dealings, and that was the situation.

As for the UK Government, which Mr MacKenzie mentioned, I have sought to deal constructively with it; indeed, Greg Barker and I jointly opened the Pentland Firth and Orkney waters marine energy park some years ago. On 2 October, I met Amber Rudd at the margins of the Ocean Energy Europe conference in Paris, and she seemed very willing for her or her senior officials to meet Pelamis. That undertaking was not delivered, but I do not say that with any political intent. Frankly, by that stage, it was probably too late to turn the situation around.

I do not particularly want to blame the UK Government. In fact, although I have some sympathy with many of the points that Mr MacKenzie made, the opportunity that has emerged and the way in which we can deliver the aspirations that members have described in this debate lie partly in looking forward to the post-May scenario and seeing whether the UK Government can make more of a financial contribution to the wave sector in Scotland.

In particular, we can also work to ensure increasing support from the EU for the marine energy sector, which is now part of the EU strategic energy technology plan—the SET plan—which means that it is now eligible for funding. The work that Sian George of Ocean Energy Europe has done is very positive and brings with it the possibility that there could be realistic financial

support from the EU. I mention that because I wish to be as positive as I can in this debate.

I do not want to pre-empt the announcements that will be made on 25 February. I wanted to make it clear today that the decision will be made, but I would like to say briefly why it has taken until 25 February in order to complete our plans. The reasons are broadly twofold. First, it was determined—as I made clear in my responses to the topical questions that I mentioned earlier—that we wished to secure for Scotland the intellectual property in the Pelamis devices and other apparatus and equipment. That proved to be a more protracted process than we had hoped, as is often the case when dealing with administrators, for various technical and unavoidable reasons.

We worked closely with KPMG and I kept in constant contact with Alex Paterson of HIE, who led the negotiations. We were closely involved at all points, and those negotiations were successfully concluded. Like most such negotiations, they were not particularly easy, but I can tell Mr Chisholm that there were ultimately no other bidders. I believe that that is an accurate description, although I have not seen confirmation of that in writing from KPMG. I was advised that, although there were interested parties, as so often happens that did not translate into actual bids of a realistic commercial value. That answers some of the questions that Mr Chisholm's constituents have, and perhaps some of them are here in the public gallery this evening to hear the responses to perfectly straight, reasonable and fair questions.

The first thing that we had to do was therefore to secure that intellectual property, and that was done around 19 January, which is when I reported to Parliament. The second, and perhaps more important, reason for the timescale is that we need to get this right. We are setting up an extremely important new body. I wanted it to begin its life after we had worked with several of the industry leaders to ensure that it is set up on a proper footing, so that it does not become a body that purely carries out desk-based research or a body that spends too much of its budget on running itself, and so that as much of its funding as possible can be designed to take forward the various challenges with which Pelamis, Aquamarine, Albatern and others have been grappling.

Two constant themes arose from the meetings and discussions, both with me and with Alex Paterson and his colleagues at HIE. They were, first, that almost all the players in the sector felt that there could have been benefits from a more collaborative approach with regard to specific areas, such as power take-off, and, secondly, that when we make our announcement we must apply the principle that WES's *modus operandi* will be

carefully guided by people with experience of the sector, of business and of the technology. We want it to be guided in the work that it does and in the deployment of its funding by the people who know what they are talking about. I was determined that that should be the case and that that model should be applied when it is set up.

I am conscious that there were a lot of questions that I may not have answered. As I always say, my officials will look at the *Official Report*, and if there are any particular questions of fact that I have not answered, I will ensure that they are dealt with. If members wish to seek further information on any points that they feel I have not sufficiently answered in the debate, I will be happy to deal with all of them, especially as there is a confluence of objectives in this chamber.

I will conclude with the promise that this Government will do everything that it possibly can, in every practical way, to make the dream of wave energy—a dream that has been almost converted into a reality of a reliable, efficient and steady stream of electricity that can become commercially capable of being developed—into a reality.

Scotland has some of the best potential wave resource in the world. More importantly, we have EMEC in Orkney—Mr McArthur's constituency—and, around our coasts, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, we have communities that are committed to the support of wave energy. We will do our utmost to ensure that Scotland realises these ambitions for wave energy and, within the next five to 10 years, converts them into a reality, in a world-leading role.

Meeting closed at 17:51.

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