



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 1 April 2015

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 1 April 2015

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance, Constitution and Economy

Economy (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley)

1. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it has introduced to boost the economy in Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley. (S4O-04184)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): "Scotland's Economic Strategy" reaffirms our commitment to increasing sustainable economic growth for all of Scotland, which is essential to achieving a more productive, more cohesive and fairer country. Our continued investment in infrastructure, regeneration and business support helps to boost the economy in Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley.

Willie Coffey: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the dairy industry is an important part of the local economy. How does he see the recently launched dairy action plan assisting local milk producers, and how might it benefit the local economy in general?

John Swinney: Mr Coffey is correct to say that the dairy sector plays an important economic role in many rural parts of Scotland, including in the Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley constituency. The dairy plan that was launched by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment, Richard Lochhead, on 24 March, aims to improve the resilience of the Scottish dairy sector and to provide the right platform to ensure that the entire industry can thrive against the backdrop of a very volatile world market.

Some of the contents of the Government's economic strategy—encouraging innovation, improving productivity and encouraging companies to look at international business opportunities—will be relevant to the activities of the dairy industry in Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley. I encourage Mr Coffey to point his constituents in the direction of finding active ways in which they can participate in developing that strategy in the local area.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): The cabinet secretary will be aware how important the Kilmarnock

campus of Ayrshire College is to the economy in Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley. He will also be aware of the funding shortfall in the Ayrshire College budget for 2015-16. The shortfall in this financial year is being met by turning depreciation into hard cash. Will the shortfall in the 2015-16 budget for Ayrshire College and others again be met by using cash allocated in budget terms for depreciation to meet the cash requirements of student funding, or will other sources of funding be provided?

John Swinney: Mr Scott will be familiar with the allocations of resources that have been made as part of the annual budget round, which concluded in early February and which gave allocations to the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, which in turn distributes the resources to Ayrshire College.

The appropriateness and utilisation of the resources that are available to the funding council and then, by onward transit, to Ayrshire College are a matter for the funding council to determine in dialogue and discussion with Ayrshire College. The Government would expect that dialogue to focus on supporting the achievement of the outcomes that the Government seeks from its investment in the further education sector.

Economy and Public Services

2. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve the economy and public services. (S4O-04185)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth. "Scotland's Economic Strategy" set out an overarching framework and actions for increasing competitiveness and tackling inequality in Scotland. We also remain focused on delivering a cross-sector programme of public service reform, and a clear strategic direction for protecting and improving Scotland's public services is now well established.

Neil Bibby: The main fiscal policy of the Scottish National Party Government is, of course, full fiscal autonomy, which would lead to £7.6 billion of cuts, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Can the finance secretary tell us when he wants to see full fiscal autonomy come into force and why he thinks that a policy that will lead to £7.6 billion of cuts is a good idea?

John Swinney: I believe that full fiscal autonomy would give Scotland the economic

levers to strengthen our economic performance and, as a consequence, to improve the productivity and, furthermore, the public finances of the country. I do not think that that is a particularly surprising ambition, given that I thought that we were all here to try to improve economic performance and to deliver stronger public finances as a consequence. If Mr Bibby is the slightest bit concerned about cuts, he should look at the Labour Party proposition for the forthcoming elections. It has signed up to the charter for budget responsibility, which involves £30 billion-worth of cuts. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order.

John Swinney: Before Mr Bibby comes anywhere near me, he should reconcile the issues in his party—the Labour Party—and think about the slash and burn cuts that it proposes for public services in Scotland.

Revenue Scotland (Information Technology)

3. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the implementation of the Revenue Scotland information technology system. (S4O-04186)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The implementation of the Scottish electronic tax system is an operational matter for Revenue Scotland. I discussed the issue with the chief executive of Revenue Scotland this morning. The system opened for sign-up for both the devolved taxes on 16 February, and registration opened for the Scottish landfill tax on the same day. The online return for land and buildings transaction tax has been available to users since 24 March. I am pleased to inform Parliament that the chief executive confirmed to me that, as planned, the system has today started to collect the first national tax to be introduced by a Scottish Parliament in more than 300 years, and it undertook that online.

Gavin Brown: I am glad that the first transactions have gone through fine online. Approximately what percentage of transactions will be done through the online portal?

John Swinney: I do not know what that proportion will be, as that will be for the market to determine. However, as of about 1.45 this afternoon, 83 transactions had been undertaken on the online system. I told Parliament that the online system would be available for operation on 1 April, but there were some doubters in Parliament. I would have thought that some of them could have come to Parliament and

congratulated Revenue Scotland on the achievement of having an online system available, but perhaps that is too much to ask on a Wednesday afternoon.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Revenue Scotland on operating online. However, before we congratulate ourselves, I point out that, yesterday, a firm of solicitors contacted a member of the Scottish Parliament to complain that the new land and buildings transaction tax forms were not yet available. I assume that that is because it was a day early. However, the cabinet secretary will of course be aware that conveyancing transactions cannot be registered at Registers of Scotland without a tax-paid certificate. Can he confirm that there are no problems at all with the implementation of Scotland's new landfill tax and land and buildings transaction tax?

John Swinney: I am grateful to Jackie Baillie for her warm words towards Revenue Scotland, which are in stark contrast to what she was drivelling on about in *The Times* on Monday.

The Government has taken forward arrangements for the implementation of land and buildings transaction tax and landfill tax. There has been good co-operation between Revenue Scotland and Registers of Scotland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which will be involved in the administration of the taxes. I am satisfied with the arrangements that have been put in place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members that they should use parliamentary language and be respectful to one another.

Smith Agreement (Implementation)

4. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government on the implementation of the Smith agreement. (S4O-04187)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Since the United Kingdom Government published its draft clauses on 22 January, the Scottish Government has provided a range of detailed comments on the drafting and the scope of the clauses, with the aim of ensuring that they implement the Smith commission recommendations in full. That has been accompanied by discussions at ministerial and official level, including two meetings of the joint ministerial working group on welfare. The Scottish Government has also started work on development of the fiscal framework, which will be a critical element in implementing the Smith commission proposals. I met the Chancellor of the

Exchequer on 2 March to discuss progress on that work.

Jim Eadie: The Deputy First Minister will be aware that academic analysis by Robert Gordon University shows that the draft clauses water down the already minimalist provisions of the Smith agreement. Does he agree that the absence of the power to create new benefits and the restrictions that are placed on the categories of people to whom benefits can be paid clearly show that the UK Government is already reneging on the implementation of the Smith agreement and that therefore the only way to deliver significant additional powers to the Scottish Parliament is to send a strong team of Scottish National Party members to Westminster to speak up and stand up for Scotland? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

John Swinney: The Government has raised a number of issues with the UK Government on the detailed definition of the clauses that were published on 22 January. We have shared with the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee detailed information on the matters that we believe have to be addressed. The Scottish Government has engaged constructively with the UK Government on the specifics of what we believe are deficiencies in the draft clauses, which are now subject to consultation.

I point out to Mr Eadie that his observations have been reinforced by observations from a number of stakeholders who have been involved in the dialogue on the implementation of the clauses. I hope that those issues are properly addressed by the incoming UK Government; we have made that point in our discussions.

Mr Eadie is correct to say that the best approach to safeguard Scotland's interests will be to secure the election of a strong team of SNP members of Parliament at Westminster, who will be able to protect and promote the Scottish interest on all occasions and without reservation.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I note that the Scottish Government has stopped referring to vetoes being contained in the new powers, and I welcome that development. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the two Governments working together constructively to deliver the new powers will do much more to secure Scotland's interest than trying to undermine the process?

John Swinney: I will happily restore the word "veto" in my answer if that would suit Miss Goldie better, but there is a serious point at the heart of her question. She says that there is no veto in all of this. In the Smith commission proposals, one of the commitments that Miss Goldie and I made was to secure the earliest devolution of the work

programme. Last week, the UK Government vetoed the early devolution of the work programme.

During the Smith process, Miss Goldie and I were arguing for the work programme to be devolved earlier, and that position was echoed by the Labour Party. Indeed, a Labour member of the Westminster Parliament, Ian Murray, has introduced a private member's bill to seek the earliest possible devolution—by this summer, if my memory serves me right—of the work programme. Not only has that been vetoed by the UK Government, the programme contracts have been extended against the express will of the Scottish Government.

I am all for co-operation on the substance of these issues, and I have conveyed to the UK Government a detailed list of areas in which we think the draft clauses are deficient in terms of the objectives of the Smith process. We have shared that information with the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee.

I hope that there is a willingness to engage constructively and solidly in implementing not only the letter but the spirit of the Smith commission report, which—as in the example that I cited to Miss Goldie—is about taking early action to ensure that the earliest possible devolution of the work programme is delivered.

Revenue Scotland (Vacancies)

5. Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has filled all vacancies at Revenue Scotland. (S4O-04188)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The staffing of Revenue Scotland is an operational matter for Revenue Scotland. I spoke to the chief executive this morning, and she confirmed that 38 of 40 operational posts have now been filled, providing Revenue Scotland with the breadth and depth of experience that it requires to collect and manage the devolved taxes.

Recruitment processes are under way for the two remaining posts, neither of which was identified as being critical for the 1 April launch.

Cameron Buchanan: Have the salaries that are being offered been increased? If so, what impact will that have on the organisation's cost?

John Swinney: There have been no increases in salaries beyond what we set out to the Finance Committee and the Public Audit Committee as part of the process. There are no changes to the financial arrangements, which have been shared openly by the Government.

We have set out information on the financial provisions on a number of occasions, including in the financial memorandum, and the chief executive of Revenue Scotland provided further information at the Public Audit Committee and the Finance Committee in December, if my memory serves me right. There have been no changes since those updates were given to the relevant committees.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 has been withdrawn, and a satisfactory explanation has been provided.

Further Devolution (House of Lords Report)

7. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the House of Lords Constitution Committee's report "Proposals for the devolution of further powers to Scotland". (S4O-04190)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government agrees with the House of Lords Constitution Committee that the proposed Scotland bill should receive "detailed scrutiny" when it is introduced after the United Kingdom election.

The bill and the accompanying fiscal framework will need to be scrutinised carefully in this Parliament to ensure that it reflects the substance and the spirit of the Smith commission proposals.

The Scottish Government has suggested changes to the draft clauses in a range of areas in order to bring them closer to the intentions of the Smith report. I hope that the new UK Government will work with us to make those improvements and to ensure that the additional powers are transferred to the Scottish Parliament as soon as possible.

Graeme Dey: Does the Deputy First Minister agree with me that it is an outrage for a group of unelected peers to respond as they have to the prospect of this Parliament obtaining increased powers? Does he also agree with me that it is high time that the democratic anomaly that is the House of Lords is addressed by its abolition?

John Swinney: I agree with Mr Dey about abolition of the House of Lords. In relation to the select committee report, it expresses a number of views, some of which are worthy of being considered and taken further and some of which do not require much attention. In the course of parliamentary scrutiny, Parliament will have the opportunity to consider any relevant remarks that come from that committee and how they might affect the formulation of the forthcoming legislation.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To the great disappointment of Mr Dey, I am still around and occupying a place in another house.

The House of Lords committee noted that Scotland and the UK have been in a period of constitutional upheaval for 15 years, which is unprecedented in mature western democracies. Can the cabinet secretary make a commitment that, once the new powers are in effect, the Scottish Government will end constitutional wrangling and give the new powers a chance to work effectively for the people of Scotland?

John Swinney: There is in that a pretty fundamental point about what we have gone through in the aftermath of the referendum—since September.

First, I state that where there is, in terms of the political process, a need for and an obligation on this Government to co-operate to implement particular changes, we co-operate in full. For example, in formulation of the approach on the land and buildings transaction tax, the landfill tax and various other provisions that arose from the Calman commission—which, if my memory serves me right, Miss Goldie helped to found but did not serve on—this Government has progressed in a spirit of effective co-operation. In fact, we have got to the point in respect of the LBTT in which the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury and I were just the other day able to exchange correspondence that enabled the UK Government to switch off stamp duty land tax in Scotland and enabled me to switch on LBTT. There were perfectly orderly arrangements to make that happen. Wherever such arrangements are required, this Government will undertake that activity.

However, Ms Goldie must appreciate—I would have thought that she does appreciate this—that SNP members have views that are different to hers about the constitutional arrangements that are appropriate for Scotland. Those are appropriately held, deeply held and sincerely held views about the arrangements of our country: they are as deeply and sincerely held as I know Miss Goldie's are on her position. We simply have to leave it to the people of our country to decide what our future should be. We are happy to enable them to do exactly that.

Renewable Heat Target

8. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Committee on Climate Change's expert statement that further actions are required if the 2020 renewable heat target is to be met. (S4O-04191)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): We welcome the Committee on

Climate Change's consideration of progress and action in regard to emissions reductions in Scotland.

We are making progress on the target to have 11 per cent of non-electrical heat demand supplied from renewables by 2020, but there is no doubt that it will be a challenging target to meet, particularly in the context of our not having within our competence the full range of drivers. For example, the renewable heat incentive is a United Kingdom Government scheme.

In order to focus and drive the pace of change, in 2014 we published our draft heat generation policy statement. It has a particular focus on encouraging uptake of renewable heat technologies and maximizing the potential of existing and new renewable heat sources. We expect the final statement to be published soon.

Sarah Boyack: I thank the minister for that response. Will the Scottish Government publish an update on progress towards the expert commission's 18 recommendations? Also, will the specific points that are raised in the Committee on Climate Change's report be actioned urgently? Many things that are within the Scottish Government's competence can be done, for example the setting up of a heat networks delivery unit and a requirement to consider district heating for all new developments. If the minister does not feel able to confirm those today, will he ask the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism whether he would be prepared to meet me to discuss taking forward those issues?

Joe FitzPatrick: I acknowledge Sarah Boyack's long-standing deep commitment to this matter. I could go through some of the issues that she has raised, but it is probably best if we arrange a meeting between the minister and the member.

Economy (Mid Scotland and Fife)

9. Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to grow the economy in Mid Scotland and Fife. (S4O-04192)

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 Mid Scotland and Fife, we continue to support economic growth, with substantial investment in infrastructure and business support. For example, 113 businesses across Mid Scotland and Fife have benefited from more than £55 million of regional selective assistance awards since 2007, which has created or safeguarded 5,603 jobs.

Jayne Baxter: Does the cabinet secretary agree that for the long-term sustainable growth of the Scottish economy we must shift the balance of investment towards manufacturing? Can he provide me with more detail of the progress that is being made to bring such investment to strategic employment sites in Fife, including the Rosyth waterfront area, the Motorola site in Dunfermline and the energy park at Methil?

John Swinney: On the fundamental point that Jayne Baxter raises, I agree entirely that the Government's economic strategy is focused on strengthening innovation, encouraging inclusive growth and supporting investment in particular companies and in the wider infrastructure of the country. It is also focused on encouraging companies to be more actively involved in wider international business activity.

On the sites that Jayne Baxter referred to, additional freight capacity on the Forth was identified as a national development to assist in ensuring that proposals for the development of the Rosyth facility are delivered. That remains a central part of national planning framework 3. Scottish Enterprise has been heavily involved in investment in the Methil site and we will continue to encourage and support economic development on the site.

The Government undertakes a number of very focused initiatives to ensure that we have sites available for particular development and to encourage manufacturing companies either to locate to or to expand and grow in those areas.

The Scottish manufacturing advisory service, which is available through Scottish Enterprise, is available to companies in the Fife area. We encourage companies to take up such opportunities.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary advise what are the potential benefits to the Mid Scotland and Fife economy of the University of St Andrews renewable energy project at Guardbridge?

John Swinney: That is one of a number of energy projects that are being taken forward; Jayne Baxter referred to the energy park at Methil. We encourage and support the development of renewable energy projects throughout the country. I am sure that the work that is under way at St Andrews will be of great benefit in expanding and developing knowledge and the approach to project development within those areas.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): One proposal from the Scottish Government that will have an impact on the Mid Scotland and Fife economy is the plan to reintroduce business rates on sporting interests. Will the cabinet secretary tell us whether those rates will be charged on all

agricultural land to which sporting rights are attached?

John Swinney: The Government is still engaged in a detailed consultation on all of those issues. When we set out our further proposals on land reform, the particular issue that Murdo Fraser raises will be dealt with in that consultation. The Government believes that the anomaly that is created by the absence of business rates from sporting estates should be closed as part of the land reform process. We will set out the detail in due course.

Economy (Dumfries and Galloway)

10. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to help regenerate the economy of Dumfries and Galloway. (S4O-04193)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth and regeneration in Dumfries and Galloway. We support the work of the south of Scotland alliance, which is driving forward the south of Scotland rural regional economic development programme. Projects in that programme will encourage economic activity, promote growth, increase inward investment and protect and create employment across Dumfries and Galloway.

Alex Fergusson: I am grateful for that answer but I can think of no greater stimulus to the economy of my constituency than the regeneration of Stranraer harbour waterfront, which is a large and prominent area of land that has become increasingly derelict since Stena, the ferry company, moved to its new port facility north of Cairnryan. I am glad that the cabinet secretary mentioned the south of Scotland alliance, which gave us a briefing two weeks ago, and highlighted the Stranraer harbour waterfront development as one of its top priorities.

Two bids are reportedly being considered for the redevelopment of that site but no outcome has been forthcoming, despite one being promised for some time. What steps might the cabinet secretary be able to take to move the process forward? Will he consider the creation of a special enterprise zone around Stranraer if no bids materialise?

John Swinney: I discussed this issue when I last met the south of Scotland alliance in Dumfries several weeks ago. Dumfries and Galloway Council has the lead role in the regeneration of the Stranraer waterfront, so consideration of the bids to which Mr Fergusson refers is entirely a matter for the local authority. I am certainly not sighted on

any of the detail of the bidding process, nor should I be.

I said to the south of Scotland alliance that I could see the strategic significance of the Stranraer waterfront and, once the local authority was further through the process of considering the bids, would be happy to discuss further with it and the south of Scotland alliance how we might bring together different interests, parties and players to tackle a significant issue for the Stranraer area in Mr Fergusson's constituency.

At this stage, the ball is in the local authority's court but I do not say that because the Government has nothing to do with it. The Government will happily engage constructively with the council on the issue.

I encouraged the south of Scotland alliance essentially to formulate an economic agenda for advancing key projects across the area. The alliance has responded to that constructively and I am now committed to meeting it twice a year to ensure that Government agencies are engaging to my satisfaction with the agenda that the south of Scotland alliance has created. I welcome the leadership that has been put in place by both local authorities, and I pledge to ensure that the Government engages constructively in any way we can to deliver that agenda.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I attended the meeting with the south of Scotland alliance and it specifically mentioned the absence of financial support from central Government. Among the issues that the cabinet secretary will consider, will he also consider the use of Scottish Government finance to support the initiative?

John Swinney: It really depends on the project that emerges. The Government will have to consider a multiplicity of issues. For example, if a private developer proposed to develop the Stranraer waterfront, the Government would undoubtedly have to consider state aid issues; it could not ignore them.

As I think I made clear in my answer to Mr Fergusson, the Government is willing to engage in substantive dialogue with the south of Scotland alliance on the projects. I asked the alliance to come up with a substantive agenda that would advance the questions. It has now done that and we will maintain that discussion during our six-monthly meetings to consider the most effective ways in which the Government can assist.

Institute for Fiscal Studies Post-budget Briefing

11. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the post-budget briefing by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which finds that the poorest have

seen the biggest proportionate losses as a result of the United Kingdom Government's tax and benefit changes. (S4O-04194)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Institute for Fiscal Studies has indicated that, because of the tax and benefit changes that have been implemented by the current UK Government, the poorest have suffered the biggest proportionate losses. Clearly, the UK Government's austerity agenda and welfare cuts have significantly reduced incomes for some of our poorest households and are undermining our efforts to tackle poverty.

We are doing what we can to help those who are affected. We are investing around £296 million from 2013-14 to 2015-16 to limit the damage of the cuts and changes that are being introduced. We cannot fully mitigate all the effects of welfare changes, but we will continue to make the argument for a fairer welfare system.

James Dornan: It is clear from the IFS analysis that austerity is not working, and our alternative of modest real-terms spending increases in each year of the next parliamentary session instead of cuts would see the deficit and debt fall as a share of our national income, freeing up billions of pounds to reinvest in infrastructure, skills, public services and protecting our people. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that highlights the need for a vote for the Scottish National Party in a couple of weeks, because that offers the best opportunity to stand up for all the people of Scotland?

John Swinney: It is clear from the current debate that alternative approaches to austerity can be taken. The Scottish Government believes that to be the case and we have long argued for that position. That issue is one on which people can use their votes effectively in the forthcoming general election.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): We discovered at the start of this week that the SNP had signed up to Tory austerity plans for 2015-16. Given what James Dornan has said, why has the SNP joined with the Tories in continuing austerity? Does the cabinet secretary agree with the IFS analysis that there is a £7.6 billion black hole in the Scottish budget under full fiscal autonomy?

John Swinney: I really do not know what on earth Jackie Baillie is referring to regarding the start of the week. The Scottish Government has been crystal clear that we oppose austerity. Jackie Baillie would do us all a service if she and the Labour Party took a different tack to the one that they have taken and if they supported an approach of investment in the economy to deliver

the economic growth that I thought Jackie Baillie would be interested in delivering, to create new hope and new opportunities for people in our country.

As usual, however, Jackie Baillie is continuing her partnership with the Conservatives, which saw her go through the past couple of years hand in hand—better together—and is continuing it into the election campaign into the bargain.

European Union Exit (Impact on Economy)

12. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact on the Scottish economy would be of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. (S4O-04195)

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government firmly believes that exiting the EU would have a deeply damaging impact on Scotland's economy. Membership of the EU provides us with access to the largest single market in the world, with more than 500 million potential customers. In 2013, the EU was the destination for 46 per cent of Scottish exports, worth almost £13 billion. On top of that, more than 300,000 Scottish jobs depend on those EU exports.

That is why the Scottish Government will continue to make the case for Scotland's membership of the EU going forward, as is set out in "Scotland's Action Plan for EU Engagement", which was launched last Friday, and in our booklet on the benefits of EU membership.

Colin Beattie: The minister will be aware that there are many individuals from other parts of the EU who live and work in Scotland, and whose status may be affected by a decision that the UK should withdraw from the EU. I would be grateful if he would outline what constitutional measures could be put in place to prevent Scotland from being taken out of the EU against the wishes of our people.

Humza Yousaf: The member highlights a very important point. Particularly in the run-up to the general election, we know that anti-EU migration rhetoric has been hyped up, and many parties have got behind that. All of us would recognise that EU migrants in Scotland have played a very positive role. Research from University College London has shown that, between 2001 and 2011, they contributed £20 billion to the economy. Scots who are on the continent, as the member has indicated, make a very positive contribution wherever they are, too.

A UK exit from the EU would have a drastic, catastrophic consequence for our economy. That is why the First Minister herself has made it clear

that we believe in a double lock on membership, with an exit possible only if a majority of people in all four constituent parts of the UK vote to leave.

Progressive Taxation

13. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it supports more progressive taxation for those on the very highest incomes and those with the most expensive properties. (S4O-04196)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government has set out its approach to taxation, which is based on the four principles set out by Adam Smith. Those principles are certainty; convenience; efficiency of collection; and that taxes should be proportionate to the ability to pay. The Government has placed fairness, equity and the ability to pay at the very heart of the first decisions that we have taken on national tax rates.

We have also set up the commission on local tax reform, whose remit will enable it to show how progressive the alternative tax systems that it identifies can be and the significance of any changes both to taxpayers and to the funding of public services.

Malcolm Chisholm: I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary has played catch-up with Labour on the 50p tax rate for those with the highest incomes, contradicting what Alex Salmond said on "The Andrew Marr Show" 10 days ago. Will the cabinet secretary now go further and also support a mansion tax, to provide extra money for the national health service; a bankers' bonus tax, to provide a job and training guarantee; and changes to pension tax relief for the richest pensioners, to provide more opportunities for young people?

John Swinney: The point that I would make to Mr Chisholm is that we should be judged on the actions that we take on such questions. The action that we have taken is that, when we had the opportunity to set particular tax rates, the Scottish Government used the first available opportunity—with the land and buildings transaction tax—to do exactly what Mr Chisholm talked about in his question. We have ensured that those who are living in the highest-value properties pay more on property transactions. Under the system that I have put in place, which Mr Chisholm's party voted for, 90 per cent of taxpayers are paying the same or less and 10 per cent are paying more, and those are the people who are living in the higher-value properties. I would have thought that that would give Mr Chisholm reasonable reassurance about the direction of travel.

When it came to deciding on the 50p tax rate in the House of Commons, my colleague Stewart

Hosie, the MP for Dundee East in the House of Commons in the previous Parliament, moved that the 50p tax rate be restored, but Mr Chisholm's colleagues, for some unbelievable reason, could not find it in themselves to vote in favour of such a proposition. I am told that that is about the Bain principle that no proposal that comes from the Scottish National Party should be supported. That seems to me to be rather short-sighted action by the Labour Party.

We look forward to utilising the influence that we have in the House of Commons to deliver fairness and prosperity in the aftermath of the United Kingdom general election, and we will bring those values to bear in any situation beyond the UK election.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I shall allow a brief supplementary and a brief answer.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that Westminster's 2 per cent national insurance contribution rate for high earners is regressive rather than progressive?

John Swinney: The Scottish Government believes that taxation should, in all circumstances, be related to the ability to pay, and that important decisions about the management of tax arrangements can best be taken in this Parliament, where we can take the opportunity—as we have done on land and buildings transaction tax—to deploy the values of fairness and equity, which have been at the heart of our decision making.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 14 has not been lodged. A satisfactory explanation has been provided.

Oil and Gas Industry (Support)

15. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support the oil and gas industry. (S4O-04198)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is using all the levers under its control to support the oil and gas industry. At present, the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, is in the United States holding meetings and discussions with various parties with an interest in the North Sea oil and gas sector. An extensive network of support for the oil and gas industry is delivered through Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Development International, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council. We have established the energy jobs task force, which has now met

three times and has recently published its action plan, in which it sets out some of the key measures that are being taken forward with the backing and support of key industry leaders.

Christian Allard: Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the U-turn by the chancellor, George Osborne, on taxation of the oil and gas industry was an admission that his policy for the North Sea has been wrong and that poor stewardship by the United Kingdom Government has had a detrimental impact on our oil and gas sector? Does he also agree that it has been another case of too little, too late, and that many job losses could have been avoided?

John Swinney: First of all, as the Government has made clear, we welcome the steps that were taken by the United Kingdom Government in the budget statement on 18 March. The reduction of the supplementary charge, the introduction of the basin-wide investment allowance, the reduction of petroleum revenue tax and the modest investment in exploration were all welcome. However, those steps indicate that the United Kingdom Government has realised that its stewardship of the North Sea oil and gas regime for taxation purposes had to be dramatically revised as a consequence of the results that were generated by the significant increase in the supplementary charge that has taken place since the UK Government came to office. In addition, a new Oil and Gas Authority has been put in place, changing the regulatory regime.

Therefore, in the course of the past 18 months, the UK has changed fundamentally both the fiscal regime and the regulatory regime, which demonstrates to me an acknowledgement that the UK has ill served the North Sea oil and gas sector in the way in which it has taken forward its policy agenda. The changes that have been made in the budget are welcome, and I hope that they are taken by the oil and gas industry as a signal that there is an opportunity to invest in the North Sea sector; I also hope that that opportunity is taken up by interested parties.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to the members whose questions we did not reach.

Economy and Finances

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12857, in the name of Gavin Brown, on Scotland's economy and finances.

14:40

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives want to have a focused and analytical debate on the subject, specifically on the issue of full fiscal autonomy and the likely effect of that on the economy and public finances of Scotland.

Since September, the Scottish Government has had a clear stance on the issue. It wants full fiscal autonomy as soon as possible. Mr Swinney said in the chamber three short weeks ago:

"I believe that Scotland should be fully responsible for raising and spending all its own resources."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2015; c 26.]

There are three reasons why we want to have this debate today. First, we do not think that anywhere near enough attention has been given to an issue that would represent a fundamental change to Scotland, and it could be a potential reality if the Scottish Government is in a position of influence in the coming months.

Secondly, a number of experts have suggested that we would be worse off under full fiscal autonomy—not just slightly worse off, but markedly worse off, with some frightening figures out there from independent experts. We have seen such figures from people who are against full fiscal autonomy—that is to be expected—but we have also seen them from people who are neutral as regards full fiscal autonomy. This morning, we saw them from somebody who is in favour of full fiscal autonomy but who has the maturity to accept and admit that there would be challenging times for Scotland, particularly in the short term, were we to go down that path. If only the Scottish Government was as open and candid as the person we heard this morning.

This is important, because the entire package is being sold by the Scottish Government and the Scottish National Party at this election as the only way to end austerity. They are not saying that we might be round about the same or that we might be slightly worse off. They are saying that we will be so much better off that there will be no requirement for any spending reductions whatsoever over the course of the next Parliament. They even have the audacity to suggest that the proposal would boost the revenues that are available for the Scottish Government to spend.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I wonder whether the member accepts the principle that the Scottish Government and the SNP want both more powers for Scotland and the best possible deal for Scotland, and that we are not going to argue for a deal that makes Scotland worse off.

Gavin Brown: I am not sure whether Mr Mason simply does not understand the arithmetic or whether that is actually an admission from Mr Mason, who is a straightforward character when it comes to debating, that we would actually be worse off in Scotland were we to go for full fiscal autonomy and therefore he is not going to argue for it. That is somewhat against what ministers on his front bench will argue today and have argued over the past weeks and months.

The third reason why we want this debate is that the Scottish Government has failed to publish any figures on the basic impact on our finances of full fiscal autonomy. It has been able to ignore some of the more challenging questions in the wider debates on the economy that we have had in the Parliament. Today, we want to debate the specific issue so that we can hear straight from the Deputy First Minister what those figures are. We implore him to publish the figures so that the people of Scotland can see in a transparent fashion what the impact would be.

Some people in this country may well want full fiscal autonomy even if it means that we are markedly worse off, and that is their right. However, many people will be voting on the judgment of whether we will be better or worse off. That is why the Scottish Government, as the Government in this country, has a duty to publish those figures so that people can make their own decisions.

I will look at what the experts have been saying. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, which has independent and highly regarded experts, has been pretty up front on the issue. The IFS has looked at the reduced oil revenues, due to a lower price, higher costs and tax breaks; it has also looked at what the fiscal position would be for Scotland and for the United Kingdom. We know through the "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland" figures that the UK had a fiscal deficit of 5.6 per cent in 2013-14 and that Scotland had a fiscal deficit of 8.1 per cent, which is a marked difference. However, the IFS projections suggest that the deficit for the UK would drop in 2014-15 to 5 per cent, and then down to 4 per cent in 2015-16. For Scotland, under full fiscal autonomy, the deficit would increase to 8.6 per cent for 2014-15 and stay at 8.6 per cent for the following year.

By the end of the 2015-16 financial year, we could have a position in which the UK had a falling

deficit of 4 per cent but Scotland had a rising deficit of 8.6 per cent, or more than double the UK deficit. That would translate, as the IFS states, to a £7.6 billion gap that would have to be plugged by a measure such as decreasing spending. However, that would have to be over and above the trajectory of the UK Government for that as set out in the recent budget, so it would mean having every spending reduction set out by the UK and £7.6 billion on top of that. However, if the Scottish Government did not want to make £7.6 billion-worth of cuts, it would have to increase tax to a degree or increase borrowing to degree, but the most likely outcome would probably be a combination of all three.

Does the Scottish Government accept that figure of £7.6 billion? Every time the Scottish Government has been asked that question, as it was again today by Neil Bibby at portfolio question time, it has ignored it. Does the Scottish Government accept the figure of £7.6 billion or does it have an alternative figure? If it does, will it publish it? Will the Scottish Government tell this chamber and the people of Scotland what it believes the deficit figure to be?

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: Perhaps we are about to get the answer to my question from Mr MacKenzie.

Mike MacKenzie: I wonder whether the IFS calculation that the member has laid out has taken into account the potential outcomes of the forthcoming UK election and how it has figured that into the calculation.

Gavin Brown: The IFS figure is based on the projections set out by the UK Government at the time of the March budget, so no—the IFS figure does not take into account what the make-up of the UK Government will be. It does not do so for the primary reason that even the IFS does not know at this stage who the UK Government will be after the general election, so of course it cannot take into account what may happen.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: Not at the moment, Mr Brodie.

We see from Fiscal Affairs Scotland, another expert group, figures for 2019-20. I have given members the likely figure for 2015-16, but I will fast forward to the end of this session of Parliament. According to Fiscal Affairs Scotland, the UK would have a positive fiscal balance of 0.3 per cent of gross domestic product, but if Scotland were to go through full fiscal autonomy it would have a fiscal deficit of 4.3 per cent. The UK would be in the second year of a small surplus of just over £7 billion, but Scotland would have a deficit of

over £8 billion by the end of this session of Parliament. What would happen if we were to go for it and were then hit by another fiscal shock? That would be very difficult to cope with. I repeat that we would have to have £8 billion-worth of spending cuts on top of the ones that we are already going to have, or we will have tax increases or increased borrowing.

I do not claim that the Treasury, as part of the UK Government, is quite as independent as the IFS, but I invite the Scottish Government to challenge its figures on full fiscal autonomy. The Treasury has pointed out that there would be a deficit of £7.8 billion in the next financial year and that that would rise to £7.9 billion in 2018-19 and £8.4 billion in 2019-20, which is broadly in line with the estimates of others.

This morning, we heard from Jim McColl, who is a hugely respected businessman and member of the Council of Economic Advisers, who wants full fiscal autonomy. He accepts that there would be a gap. In response to the BBC, he said:

"There would be a gap if you were allocating all these revenues. Yes, there would be".

That is a direct lift from the BBC website. That should be contrasted with the Scottish Government's approach. In the same article, it said:

"Scotland already more than pays its own way".

It did not say that Scotland pays its own way; it said:

"Scotland already more than pays its own way".

If we look at last year's and this year's GERS figures, we see that that is not true.

Chic Brodie: Will the member take an intervention?

Gavin Brown: If we look at the projections for next year's GERS figures, we see that that is not true. Not a single independent respected economist or forecaster on the planet says at this stage that we would more than pay our way in any of the financial years over the next session—unless that respected economist happens to be Chic Brodie, who wants me to give way.

Chic Brodie: A man of great thought.

Mr Brown goes on about the numbers. Can he explain why, under the country and regional analysis adjustments in 2012-13, which fed through to 2013-14, there was an upward revision of over £600 million in estimates of spending by Scotland, as referred to by Her Majesty's Treasury, but the UK expenditure was cut by £1.9 billion? Why are we paying more and why have we paid more, and why does he claim that we are not doing so?

Gavin Brown: I am not quite sure whether that was Chic Brodie playing sudoku with a few numbers. It was probably nothing much more than that.

In all seriousness, the Scottish Government has thus far ducked the question, which is why we want this debate. It has not put forward its own figures and it has given very opaque answers. A couple of weeks ago, I asked John Swinney whether he accepted that we would be worse off in the short term. His answer, word for word, was:

"I have set out the fact that, by exercising responsibilities in accordance with the needs and priorities of the people of Scotland, we have the ability to achieve some of the improvements in economic performance that I have set out".—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2015; c 27.]

That was his answer to a direct question. I hear Alex Johnstone ask what that means. I do not know whether it means yes or no.

The Scottish Government has not only ducked the question; it has published a document with a very partial analysis. If one were being cynical, one might say that that was a deliberately partial analysis of some of the effects. That is serious. Just a couple of weeks ago, the Scottish Government published "Benefits of Improved Economic Performance" and gave the scenario of what it called "Full Revenue Retention". It concluded that its analysis demonstrates that our economy would be improved, our overall impact on the economy would be increased, and we could "reinvest the proceeds from successful economic policies".

The Scottish Government missed two critical factors. First, it showed potential upsides if there were greater productivity, greater business investment and a boost to exports. Crucially, it missed out how it would achieve any of those things. Its policies could easily fail, just as they could succeed. It is very easy to say what would happen if something happened; the Scottish Government did not demonstrate how.

Secondly, and more important, the Scottish Government looked at only one side of the profit and loss account. It looked at some potentially increased revenues that we might get if there were growth, but it ignored entirely the prospect that we would lose all the Barnett consequentials—the additional £1,200 per head that we currently get in public spending—as if that did not exist. The Scottish Government went to the trouble of producing a computer-generated equilibrium model over a 10-year time period for total factor productivity, but it completely and blatantly ignored the basic calculations on full fiscal autonomy.

That is a contrast with what happened two years ago, when the Scottish Government published "Scotland's Balance Sheet". In 2011-12, Scotland had a slightly lower deficit than the UK had, and

John Swinney repeatedly said in the chamber and out there in public that, because we had a slightly lower deficit, that meant that we could have had higher spending and lower taxation in Scotland and still ended up with a lower deficit than the rest of the UK. If John Swinney was correct then—he said that dozens of times—that must mean by implication that, with the higher deficit in Scotland now and the projected increasing deficit, if we had full fiscal autonomy in Scotland, we could have lower public spending and higher taxation and still end up with a higher deficit than the UK.

We have pushed the Scottish Government to publish the figures so that members and the people of Scotland can look at the numbers transparently to see what the Scottish Government is actually planning for the people of Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the Scottish Government seeks to achieve full fiscal autonomy for Scotland within the UK; notes that a number of experts predict a weaker fiscal position for Scotland should full fiscal autonomy be achieved and is concerned about the tighter fiscal challenge that could be faced; believes that a potential net fiscal deficit of over double that of the UK in 2015-16, as outlined by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, would be damaging for the Scottish economy; calls on the Scottish Government to arrange for publication of an update to the *Outlook for Scotland's Public Finances* to take into account changes to the projected public finances since its original publication in May 2014 and to reflect the current Scottish Government policy of seeking full fiscal autonomy; believes that the update should be conducted and published by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish an updated oil and gas analytical bulletin as soon as possible.

14:55

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Scotland requires the social and economic powers that are necessary to reflect the people of Scotland's needs and preferences and to enable the people of Scotland to build on the strong economic foundations that we have and to tackle some of the long-standing issues and challenges that our society faces and which the UK system has so far failed to enable us to address. For example, there is persistent inequality in our society, and the efforts of the Scottish Government—and our predecessors—to tackle that issue, on which we had made progress for a number of years, are being halted by the UK Government's policy choices, which are placing burdens on some of the poorest in our society.

That one example illustrates why we have to do something different. Mr Brown argued that we should continue with the status quo and do nothing to tackle or interrupt some of the deep-seated problems that trouble many of us in our society. However, the Scottish Government wants

to do something about them; indeed, that was at the heart of our initiative around last September's referendum. In the referendum's aftermath, we are seeking an opportunity to shape a better future by obtaining the powers that would enable Scotland to build a stronger and more productive economy and deliver a level of economic performance that would mean that we could reinvest in the delivery of public services.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: If Mr Fraser allows me to make a bit of progress, I will give way in a second.

In considering those issues and making our case, I should point out that we accept the referendum's outcome and that, as a result, our proposals are set within the UK's fiscal framework. In other words, a fiscally autonomous Scotland would operate within the fiscal and macroeconomic framework of the UK, but we would be responsible for virtually all the taxes and spending on almost all the public services and the welfare system in Scotland. The benefits of such an approach are clear: it would enable us to build on the foundations that we have for a successful economy and to tackle some of the deep-seated issues that we face.

Scotland's onshore output per head is similar to the UK average and, in the UK, ranks behind only that of London and the south-east; when our North Sea resources are included, Scotland's output per head is more than £1,600 per person higher than the UK average. We also have a higher employment rate than any other country in the UK and, for the benefit of the historical analysis, I point out that in every one of the past 34 years, Scotland has generated more than the UK as a whole in tax revenue per person.

I cite those facts in order to tackle some of the issues that Mr Brown raised, because the implication of his speech is that Scotland is somehow incapable of building on those foundations to deliver a better outcome and a better future for the people of Scotland.

Gavin Brown: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: I will give way to Mr Brown, and I remember that I promised to give way to Mr Fraser, too.

Gavin Brown: I certainly do not think that we are incapable of doing what the cabinet secretary has suggested, but I do think that the Scottish Government should be candid and up front about the fact that, over the period of five-year projections that we have, things would be more challenging. We would not be able to increase public spending; instead, we would have to

decrease it and tighten things even further. Surely the cabinet secretary should be up front about that.

John Swinney: That was not the inference that I took from Mr Brown's speech. With the full policy levers of independence, we could improve on the performance that we have delivered. I will set out some of those benefits in a moment, but I will happily give way to Mr Fraser, if he wishes to intervene.

Murdo Fraser: The question that I wished to ask the cabinet secretary is this: if he is right in his analysis and if he is right in saying that the Scottish Government is trying to create a stronger economy and reduce inequality, both of which are laudable objectives, can he explain how a £7.6 billion reduction per annum in the Scottish Government's budget will assist that process?

John Swinney: I will come on to address how that will come about, but first I want to go through some of the implications of different responsibilities being exercised in Scotland since the Government came to power in 2007.

We have managed to increase the value of Scottish international exports by 40 per cent; business research and development spending has increased by 29 per cent; and the Scottish productivity rate has gone from being 6 per cent lower than the UK rate in 2007 to sitting at around the same level as UK productivity. I therefore dispute the dismal assessment that is put forward by those who say that we cannot possibly exercise distinctive responsibilities to create better economic performance. Despite everything that was said during the referendum campaign about no one wanting to invest in Scotland, we have been ranked the first or second most attractive part of the UK for inward investment in every year since 2006.

As well as enabling us to tailor economic policy to encourage investment in job creation, full fiscal autonomy would ensure that decisions about the level and composition of taxation and public spending in Scotland reflected the needs and preferences of the people and businesses of Scotland. That point is important, because fiscal autonomy would enable us to take a different course of action.

Mr Brown cited a variety of numbers, but all the analysis that he mentioned does not take into account the potential benefits of fiscal autonomy. He cited the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which said on 11 March:

"full fiscal autonomy would give more freedom to pursue different, and perhaps better fiscal policy, and to undertake the radical, politically challenging reforms that could generate additional growth. There are undoubtedly areas where existing UK policy could be improved upon."

That rather makes my point for me. In a nutshell, that is what fiscal autonomy would give us an opportunity to do. It would enable us to take decisions that built on the economic record that I set out a moment ago to deliver a stronger economic performance.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The IFS also said that there would be a £7.6 billion gap. If we take the assumptions about the country's economic performance that are made in the Government's second paper, even using the best figures, £3.5 billion a year would be generated, whereas the gap is £7.6 billion. Where would we get the missing £4.1 billion from?

John Swinney: Jackie Baillie passes by the caveat that the IFS included, which is that the economy's performance can be influenced as a consequence of exercising the responsibilities that we are talking about and having control of the levers that we seek.

Another point that I will make in response to Jackie Baillie relates to how fiscal autonomy will come about. Let us consider the process by which the Scottish Parliament has acquired additional fiscal responsibilities. The new taxes that have today come into operation in Scotland—land and buildings transactions tax and the landfill tax—were provided for in the Calman commission proposals, which were published in June 2009. They are now being implemented, a number of years later.

My point is not that that is the ideal timescale—I think that all of us would agree that it has taken too long to get us from the conception of those proposals to implementation—but that there is a period during which we must take steps to implement new arrangements and new mechanisms. If we look at the approach that is proposed to be taken on the Scottish rate of income tax, there is an unreserved acceptance that it is necessary to operate within the parameters of the UK fiscal framework.

Gavin Brown: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way for a second time. In his view, the correct timescale for independence was 18 months. In his view, what is the correct timescale for full fiscal autonomy?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your final minute, cabinet secretary.

John Swinney: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The timescale would inevitably be a product of negotiation with the UK Government. I can set out my view all I want, but I must accept the reality that full fiscal autonomy would take place only following negotiation with the UK. We have had to wrestle with issues to do with the fiscal framework just to take forward the Smith commission

proposals—we have had to go through a process of negotiation to enable that to happen.

Gavin Brown has called for scrutiny of the issue, which he is perfectly within his rights to ask for. The people of Scotland will also want scrutiny of the Tory cuts programme—the £12 billion of welfare cuts, not reforms, that the Prime Minister wants to take forward. Let us have detail from Gavin Brown about those cuts, so that people will be able to judge on that on 7 May. From the Labour Party, we would like to hear—

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary will hear from the Labour Party.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. The cabinet secretary is closing. We must hear him.

John Swinney: We want to hear what the Labour Party will do to fulfil the charter for budget responsibility, which involves taking forward £30 billion-worth of cuts.

I look forward to hearing from those two parties on those matters and to understanding the choice that people will have before the election on 7 May, which is between austerity and cuts from the Labour and Conservative parties and investment in the economy from the Scottish National Party.

I move amendment S4M-12857.2, to leave out from “within the UK” to end and insert:

“; recognises that Scotland requires the social and economic powers necessary to reflect the needs and preferences of the people of Scotland; notes that being tied to the UK Government’s austerity plan and welfare cuts is having a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable in society; believes in an alternative to this approach that would protect vital investment in public services and develop a fair and sustainable economy, and calls on the UK parties to set out in detail their plans for taxation and welfare ahead of the general election.”

15:05

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): This is another Wednesday, with another debate on full fiscal autonomy and the economy. Indeed, it is another debate brought by Opposition parties, not by the Government, on the Government’s flagship policy on Scotland raising all its own taxes to cover our spending.

The choice that voters in Scotland face at the general election is whether to retain the block grant and the Barnett formula, which shares with Scotland resources from across the United Kingdom, or whether to go for full fiscal autonomy within the United Kingdom. Let me put that into context and look at what that would mean for the people of Scotland.

We know that the 2013 revenue accounts for Scotland showed a black hole in the country’s

finances of £4 billion—and that was before the dramatic slump in oil prices was taken into account. For 2014-15, the black hole is forecast to grow to £6 billion. Of course, with the recent OBR oil projections and the changes in the UK budget, the black hole is forecast to grow to a staggering £7.6 billion, as confirmed by the IFS, an organisation that SNP members have been keen to quote today. We would need to slash services or increase taxes by a huge amount to fill that gap. Let me look at what that would mean.

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I will in a minute.

A gap of £7.6 billion is 60 per cent of our national health service budget; it is more than our entire schools budget; and it would completely wipe out state pensions for all Scotland’s older people. If that is not to happen, each and every one of us would face a tax bombshell of more than £1,400.

I will give way to John Mason, if he will tell me which the SNP will do: cut services or increase taxes?

John Mason: I refer Jackie Baillie to the Smith commission, which said that neither the Scottish budget nor the UK budget should be any larger or smaller as a result of the transfer of powers or of tax. Does she not accept that that principle applies?

Jackie Baillie: We are talking about full fiscal autonomy. The record will show that there was no answer from the SNP backbencher as to what the SNP would do to deal with the black hole.

Of course, there is the suggestion that we can somehow grow ourselves out of the situation, but that is just fantasy economics. The SNP had to fiddle the figures in its modelling to include assumptions about the block grant continuing, when we know that it would not. Even if we were to allow for such a gross distortion, there would still be a multibillion pound black hole at the heart of the Government’s budget—and that is using its own figures.

I used to think that John Swinney did not want to talk about the policy because he thought that it was somehow wrongheaded. After all, he is apparently the safe pair of hands in the SNP Government—the man who is all about fiscal rectitude; the man who does not take risks. Imagine my surprise—indeed, my astonishment—to find that John Swinney was the policy’s architect. He argued for it in Cabinet and he embraced it in the national conversation in 2009—it is his name on the tin.

The policy has been roundly criticised by independent experts. It is a policy that is all about economic risk. It will hurt the people of Scotland

and destroy our NHS, our schools and our pensions. We should make no mistake: the policy builds on Tory austerity plans and gives the people of Scotland austerity max. My goodness—no wonder John Swinney does not want to talk about it and prefers instead to hurl insults at Opposition members. Attack is, of course, better than defence.

John Swinney especially does not want to talk about the policy this week, when we have discovered that the SNP and the Tories have signed up to the same austerity plans for 2015-16. There we have it—in the new financial year, the people of Scotland will continue to suffer Tory austerity even if they vote for the SNP.

We were used to seeing the Tories and the SNP voting together on the budget—they were joined at the hip—between 2007 and 2010 in the Scottish Parliament, but this is a new low. The SNP has agreed to follow to the letter Tory austerity plans for this year. If John Swinney is slightly confused, I refer him to the Scottish Government's own website, which confirms the detail of that. In public, the SNP condemns the Tories for austerity; in private, the SNP fully agrees with the Tories and signs on the dotted line for continued austerity. What hypocrisy.

John Swinney: I genuinely do not understand the point that Jackie Baillie is making. I wonder whether she will explain it to us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are approaching your last minute, Ms Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: I refer John Swinney to the Scottish Government's summary document "Increasing Public Spending: Comparison of Policy Costings", which is dated March 2015 and which sets out, under the heading "Alternative spending proposal", zero additional spending for 2015-16. I refer him to the Scottish Government's own website, which tells him that.

We are now in no doubt at all that a vote for the SNP is a vote for continuing Tory austerity. The truth is that the only party that is promising to end Tory austerity is the Labour Party—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. Order. We must hear Ms Baillie finish.

Jackie Baillie: Over the past few weeks, SNP members have demonstrated just how untrustworthy they are with figures. First, they deny the black hole at the heart of Scotland's finances; then they fiddle the figures to make the position seem even better; and then they deny what the independent experts are saying and hide their plans for continued austerity. One thing is absolutely clear: honesty and transparency have been posted missing with this SNP Government.

Like others in the chamber, we believe that the SNP Government needs to publish an oil and gas analytical bulletin—one made a brief appearance prior to the referendum—and an updated outlook for Scotland's public finances that takes account of the recent projections. It should publish both before May 2015 so that people can judge whether it has something to hide.

I move, amendment S4M-12857.1, to leave out from "that the Scottish Government" to end and insert:

"that the Scottish Government's plans for full fiscal autonomy within the UK would have instant and damaging consequences for Scotland's economy, with huge funding cuts to areas such as health, education and policing totalling £7.6 billion in additional cuts or tax rises, as confirmed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies; further notes that this would be on top of Conservative austerity plans and that the Scottish Government has set out its intention to adopt Conservative austerity plans in 2015-16; calls on the Scottish Government to publish an updated *Outlook for Scotland's Public Finances* on the basis of full fiscal autonomy and an updated oil and gas analytical bulletin before the UK General Election in May 2015, and believes that the only way to avert a £7.6 billion deficit would be to reject full fiscal autonomy within the UK in favour of keeping the block grant and the Barnett formula."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate and speeches of six minutes, please.

15:12

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): When I read the Tory motion and the Labour amendment, it struck me that the Parliament can seldom have debated an amendment to a motion in which so many of the words were changed but so little of the substance was altered.

The Conservative motion and the Labour amendment are essentially the same. We heard in the opening speeches of both those better together allies that Scotland is too wee and too poor to manage its own affairs and that we should accept whatever macroeconomic policies and welfare provision Westminster decides to apply.

The only difference between the motion and the amendment is the tone. The Tory motion states that

"experts predict a weaker fiscal position for Scotland",

while the Labour amendment talks of

"instant and damaging consequences for Scotland's economy".

It is easy to see which party drew the short straw and inherited project fear.

The relish with which Labour, the Tories and, to some extent, the Lib Dems scenario plan for bad news for Scotland is sad for those who represent the people of Scotland. They never cite other small nations that do very well even without the

strong economic foundations that we have, so I was delighted to hear John Swinney outline the reality and our plans to make things better.

I understand that message coming from the Conservative Party, which is seen by voters across the UK as representing the interests of the rich and affluent, but it has increasingly come home to Scots over the past year that the electoral battle between Labour and the Conservatives is dragging Labour further towards the Tories.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The member mentions the electoral battle that is coming up. Does she not think that it is right and proper for the Scottish public to know the SNP's statistics on the whole issue? As yet, they have not had any opportunity to find that information out.

Linda Fabiani: If Labour and the Tories were honest in putting across the full detail of the Treasury paper, which did not take into account additional powers and so on, people would know better. What people in Scotland really want to know is the extent of the welfare cuts that are coming down the line from the Conservatives and are backed by Labour members when they trip through the lobbies to vote with them on austerity.

The banks failed on Labour's watch. Labour reached for a solution and planned austerity, but what Labour is now accepting is that that makes the poorest in society pay for the mistakes of the wealthiest. As I said, the Tories are at least a bit more honest. They openly pursue that ideological agenda and champion that approach.

Seven years after the crash, the OBR has been forced to conclude that, of the major economies,

"The UK was the only country where the deficit has not been reduced by having revenue growing faster than national income."

That is because the United Kingdom focused most on lower spending. All of that is the latest example of the cosy consensus that operates around Westminster—and Labour, if it is in government after May, will be happy to have its policies measured against targets put in place by George Osborne.

In relation to the SNP spending plans for this year, I have news for the finance spokesperson for Labour. We are in 2015-16. Budgets have to be agreed in advance, subject to available resources, and while unionist politicians agree that Scotland should get no more than pocket money from London we have to cut our cloth accordingly.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Linda Fabiani: No thanks—I am in my last bit.

I keep hearing on the radio—from Labour, from the Tories and from the Lib Dems—that here in Scotland we need the security of the bigger partner—a security that other small nations that do perfectly well independently do not appear to need. It seems to be us here in Scotland who are uniquely incapable.

I will say one thing about that: a lot of people do not feel that security. It is not felt by the 145,000 households affected by this Government's changes to incapacity benefit, as they lose about £2,000 each. That security is not felt by all the Scottish households that have seen their tax credits reduced this year. It is not felt by the more than 100,000 people who are losing, on average, £2,500 as disability living allowance is removed.

I think that people in Scotland want to do things differently. There is a growing body of opinion proving that we do not need simply to have a growing economy to fund our welfare provision, but that we need to squeeze inequality out of the system to provide a solid platform in order to grow the economy.

I believe that, once again, the Tories, the Lib Dems and Labour, having jointly signed up to all those cuts, are all swimming against the tide. We can do things differently. We should do things differently and better. I would like to see people across this chamber working together for the benefit of Scotland to do things better.

There are even some Labour MPs in England who have called for that. How sad it is that Labour in Scotland has not. I support John Swinney's amendment.

15:18

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Linda Fabiani, like other SNP members during the last few weeks and no doubt over the next five weeks, does not want to talk about full fiscal autonomy, so I shall come to that in a moment, as it is the main subject of the debate today.

Of course what the SNP does want to talk about, as we heard at the end of the cabinet secretary's speech, is the alleged unity of Labour and the Conservatives in terms of cuts. The cabinet secretary must know that that is not the case. Ed Balls is saying in Scotland today that he rejects the "extreme and risky plans" of the Conservatives. He is not saying anything new, because in the debate that John Swinney and all his colleagues keep referring to, when there was a vote on the charter of budget responsibility, in his speech Ed Balls also rejected the chancellor's "extreme and unbalanced plan".

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies has pointed out, there is no agreement between Labour and the Conservatives on £30 billion in cuts. The Institute for Fiscal Studies makes clear that there is a £30 billion gap between the spending plans of Labour and the Conservatives. I am sure that the Conservatives will probably go round Scotland emphasising that, and I do not mind if they do, because we have to rebut the central SNP allegation of the campaign, which has been repeated over and over again and which no doubt will be again today, that somehow Labour is signed up for those cuts.

The reality is that, as I referred to in my question to the cabinet secretary earlier, our proposals are for fair tax increases across the UK, rather than increased borrowing for current expenditure. That does not mean that we do not want increased borrowing for capital expenditure, which is important, as I am sure the cabinet secretary would agree. However, on current expenditure, we have specific proposals, which I mentioned in my question earlier. They are for the top rate of tax, which we know about; the mansion tax, for more money for the health service; the bankers' bonus tax, for the job and training guarantee; and the changes to pension tax relief for the highest-earning pensioners, for our various youth pledges.

Let us be absolutely clear that we can meet the fiscal mandate without the cuts, and we can do it over the next Parliament, because the economy will be growing over that period. Clearly, there might well be specific cuts in particular areas if money can be saved but, overall, there will not be the cuts that the SNP is talking about. We have to say that loud and clear every day during the next five weeks.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): Will Mr Chisholm sign up to the First Minister's proposal that the UK Government, after the next election, should agree to a 0.5 per cent year-on-year increase in departmental public spending as an alternative to austerity?

Malcolm Chisholm: As Jim Eadie knows—this again undercuts the SNP's central charge—the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which has rightly been much quoted in the debate, has made it clear that there is a much smaller gap between Labour and the SNP proposals than there is between the proposals of Labour and the Conservatives. I support Labour's proposals, with the proviso that the gap between them and the SNP proposals is much smaller than the gap between Labour and the Conservatives, which Mr Eadie's colleagues say does not exist.

In the second half of my speech, I will move on to full fiscal autonomy. Gavin Brown outlined what the Institute for Fiscal Studies said about that, the main point being that the projected deficit is 4 per

cent this year for the UK and 8.6 per cent for Scotland. That gap is currently filled by UK expenditure and the Barnett formula, and in cash terms it is equivalent to £7.6 billion. Of course, the Scottish Government's paper "Benefits of Improved Economic Performance" suggests that, in a best-case scenario, £3.5 billion of tax revenues could be accrued over 10 years, so the gap would still be there. We do not need to remind people about the absurd assumption in that paper that the Barnett formula would continue.

I have been looking carefully at the varying positions of SNP members on full fiscal autonomy over the past few weeks, and I will listen carefully to SNP speakers on that today. I listened very carefully to Nicola Sturgeon's eloquent speech on Saturday—she is always eloquent—and the most interesting thing was that she mentioned independence four times, which was not surprising, but she did not mention full fiscal autonomy once. It is really interesting that she does not want to talk about it.

I listened carefully to what Nicola Sturgeon said on the radio yesterday and, when pressed on that, she seemed to say that it is not really anything that is going to happen any time soon and it can come in due course. Stewart Hosie tried to say that on television today when he was pushed by Andrew Neil. John Mason has the no-detriment idea, so perhaps he should try that out with his front-bench colleagues. I am not entirely sure what position John Swinney adopted today.

Anyway, the position is being reformulated. Basically, SNP members do not want to talk about the issue at all for the next five weeks, yet it is supposed to be the central plank of their UK general election manifesto, as no less a person than Alex Salmond announced a few weeks ago. The SNP is all over the place on full fiscal autonomy. Given that it has been presented as the SNP's main demand, what would the SNP do if the UK Government actually offered it? It would say, "Not yet—we'll have it in 10 years' time." Some Conservative back benchers in the UK Parliament are actually saying, "Give it to Scotland," because they think that the UK could save money in that way.

Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate for Opposition parties to ask at least for clarity about that central SNP policy position over the next five weeks. If this debate achieves nothing else, could we please have that clarity so that we know what we are talking about before 7 May?

15:24

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Gavin Brown's motion and the Labour amendment are nothing other than a restatement

of the same old arguments that we have heard from the Tories and their Labour friends for many years. Their central and only proposition is that we are too wee, too poor and too stupid to manage our own affairs.

The argument that we are too wee has long since been dismissed by reference to a great number of small countries that outperform us in every way in which performance can be measured. I reject absolutely the suggestion that we are too stupid. I am sure that Gavin Brown believes as I do that Scotland has people who are every bit as clever and talented as those throughout the rest of the UK.

I reject absolutely the proposition that we are too poor to embrace full fiscal autonomy successfully. Scotland is a wealthy country with significant oil reserves, a huge renewable energy potential, abundant natural resources and an educated and highly skilled work force.

Liz Smith: If Mike MacKenzie is so confident of all those things, why can he not give us the numbers to back them up?

Mike MacKenzie: As the cabinet secretary has already outlined, the IFS predictions take no account of the significant opportunities that would arise if Scotland's finances were in the capable hands of John Swinney instead of the incapable hands of George Osborne.

We have all the ingredients for success, and if Gavin Brown believes that we are too poor we have to ask him—and I hope that he will tell us the answer later—why he believes that that is the case, and why it can never change.

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Mike MacKenzie: In a second or two.

We have to ask Gavin Brown why he is so complacent about his dismal prospectus.

Gavin Brown: I do not think that we are too poor at all, but according to the independent projects we would be poorer in each of the next five years of the UK Parliament. Mike MacKenzie's party is saying that we would be better off and would have no need for any austerity; in that case, why does his party not publish the figures?

Mike MacKenzie: If Gavin Brown believes that that is correct, we have to ask him why, as a Tory who presumably does not believe in a dependency culture, he believes that we should be forever dependent on the rest of the UK.

We have to ask Gavin Brown why, as a Tory who presumably believes in self-sufficiency, we in Scotland should not be self-sufficient. We have to ask him why, as a unionist and a Tory, he does not agree that it would be better for Scotland and for the rest of the UK for Scotland to have the full

powers to improve its economic performance; surely that is also better for Gavin Brown's beloved UK.

I believe that Gavin Brown believes as I do that the Scottish Government has been following a wise economic course since 2007, because the data is unequivocal. The Scottish economy has begun to outperform the UK economy since 2007. I believe that Gavin Brown believes as I do that we have great opportunities to grow the Scottish economy, significantly increasing our productivity and therefore our competitiveness and fiscal performance.

Where we differ is in the fact that Gavin Brown believes that maintaining the union in its present form trumps all other considerations. Gavin Brown believes that maintaining an archaic system of Government should be our highest consideration and priority. He believes in a dismal economic philosophy that is based on the outdated idea that driving down real wages and creating a new class of working poor increases our competitiveness.

If that plan was working, George Osborne would have met his deficit reduction targets rather than missing each and every one of them. It is true that the UK is growing faster than some other economies, but it is growing from a lower base, and it is growing on the backs of increasing the numbers of the poor rather than by creating real prosperity. It is growing in a way that is failing to produce sufficient taxation to reduce the deficit properly.

There is another way—a more sustainable way—that the reduction of the deficit can be delivered over a slightly longer timeframe. The SNP economic plan has been endorsed by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. It is a plan in which growth is delivered through investment in our people and in our infrastructure. It is a plan in which growth is delivered by fiscal stimulus and by investment directed to areas where we have comparative advantages. It is a plan to deliver higher wages and a prosperity that is shared by all of Scotland's people. It is a fairer and, ultimately, a faster way to master our debt, so that we are the masters of our finances and not the victims of them, because money should always be our servant and it should never be our master.

15:31

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to play a part in the debate. To some extent, it is depressing—although one should have anticipated it—that we have reaffirmed some of the arguments that we engaged in last autumn. No one on the Labour benches mentioned anything about Scotland being

too wee or too poor; no one on these benches said anything about the history that led us to that well-known debate about full policy levers of independence, a phraseology that the cabinet secretary returned to today.

It is in that context that no one on the Government front benches mentioned full fiscal autonomy. It is the subject under discussion just now; it is important that we have clarity as to the impact that arises from full fiscal autonomy. However, to me, as a simple Scotsman, it looks suspiciously like independence, chapter 1, with Barnett apparently in there somehow but with the IFS showing signs that the shortfall in our budgets will be £7.6 billion in the coming years.

To that extent, it is frightening to think that a Government would take us forward with no clear idea of how much is coming from—

Mike MacKenzie: Is what the member said not just another way of saying that we are too poor?

Graeme Pearson: Certainly not. If we were too poor, we would not have the lights switched on in the chamber today. We have money; it is about how we manage that money and where we anticipate the money will come from in the future. That £7.6 billion shortfall has an impact on and implications for public services.

Only today, the Scottish Police Federation has pointed to the fact that cutting £60 million from the Police Scotland budget has serious implications for policing on our streets. How much more impact does the loss of £7.6 billion from a total budget of somewhere in excess of £30 billion have on a whole range of areas including the NHS, education, roads, and all the other responsibilities that we accept here in Scotland?

Stuart McMillan: Graeme Pearson said that it is about how we spend the money. Would he therefore agree with me that we would be better off if we scrapped Trident and saved the £100 billion that that will cost the economy?

Graeme Pearson: I do not know how full fiscal autonomy has any impact on whether we run Trident or otherwise. I am sure that it is a good distraction from the main purpose of our argument today. However, the important matter that we must face is that the number of food banks in this country stands in excess of 345. The number of homeless persons is still at an unacceptable level, with 199 more children declared homeless than was the case this time last year.

Our attention should be dedicated to ensuring that that £30 billion-plus is better spent across Scotland and that we function in a way that ensures that our Government is effective in delivering the services that Scottish people want.

The cabinet secretary indicated that the benefit of his approach will be to enhance economic performance. I cannot join up the dots between the declaration that he makes in Parliament and how he will deliver the enhancement of economic performance.

There is then the illusion that there will be an increase in productivity. Again, that seems to be outwith the cabinet secretary's influence and power. The enhancement of productivity across the private sector will be very much a matter for those industries that are based here, in the way in which they deliver on the services and exports that we require from them.

The Minister for Transport and Islands (Derek Mackay): Is that not exactly the point? The Scottish Government seeks the power to stimulate our economy. That being the case, what is Labour's proposition to accelerate growth specifically in Scotland?

Graeme Pearson: I wish that I had enough time left. The minister knows fine well the game that is played in these debates. The reality is that we face the growing presence of zero-hours contracts. Labour has declared against such contracts. The reality is that there is too much part-time working and too many people in our nation exist on the margins of real living.

Labour has proposed that there should be an £8 an hour living wage—we are committed to that. Over the past year, we have encouraged the Government to declare that for its public contracts across Scotland. I am glad to see that, eventually, the Government has come forward and supported that proposal.

In short, I would like to hear more about what full fiscal autonomy really means and what the impact would be for Barnett and the total budget available in the years ahead should the cabinet secretary get his way.

15:37

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to debate the economy once again—the third time in about a month. Clearly, the Opposition parties think that the economy is a strong point for them, yet all the evidence shows that that is not the case.

It is useful to look at past record as an important factor in the debate. I want to spend a minute or two looking at the past record of various parties. First, there are the Conservatives, who at Westminster, as Mike MacKenzie told us, have missed virtually all their targets on debt and so on. Sure, they may have controlled expenditure, but they have done so in a very harsh way that is not acceptable to most civilised people in Scotland.

The Conservatives have a history of being cold hearted and often seem to forget that it is real people who suffer as a result of their impersonal economics.

Then we have Labour, which at Westminster oversaw a collapse of the UK economy. Some would argue that mismanaging the economy is a trademark of Labour Governments. However, in the past, if Labour was mismanaging the economy, it did so in a much nicer way than the Tories did. More recently, though, Labour lost that more caring approach as it sought to get votes from Tory middle England.

Of course, these days we are focused on resisting the harsh Conservative welfare reforms. However, we were resisting harsh welfare reforms during my time at Westminster, too—only those were harsh Labour welfare reforms.

Lest the Lib Dems feel left out of my recollections of the past, where do they stand these days? Before 2010, people thought that the Lib Dems were to the left of Labour and that they stood for democratic reform, such as the single transferable vote. Five years later, however, and after five years of the Lib Dems in government, we see no serious electoral reforms, and the Lib Dems have propped up a Tory Government that most of their supporters did not want.

By contrast, I would suggest that the SNP record in government has been extremely good. We have run a balanced budget, introduced more progressive taxation and protected the most vulnerable from the worst Westminster cuts. Just today, we have new bankruptcy laws in place. We have two new taxes in place and Revenue Scotland has been introduced today. I understand that the rail franchise projects have been given a very positive appraisal by Audit Scotland.

The records speak for themselves. In the 2011 election, I and others were elected under the slogan “Record, Team, Vision”. It clearly continues to be the case that this party and Government have the best record, the best team, and the best vision.

Gavin Brown: The member talks about balanced budgets, but is it not the case that, in the current financial year, his Government is unable to spend something like £150 million despite demanding more money now?

John Mason: If the member looks at the percentages, he will see that that is exceptionally good—if he works to that level of accuracy with his monthly salary, he is doing very well.

I now change tack slightly to keep Malcolm Chisholm happy because he referred to no detriment. Labour and the Tories suggest that more powers might lead to Scotland being worse

off. The no-detriment principle is a central factor in the transfer of further powers to the Scottish Parliament. It was agreed to by all parties as part of the Smith agreement, paragraph 95(3) of which says:

“(3) No detriment as a result of the decision to devolve further power: the Scottish and UK Governments’ budgets should be no larger or smaller simply as a result of the initial transfer of tax and/or spending powers, before considering how these are used.

(a) This means that the initial devolution and assignment of tax receipts should be accompanied by a reduction in the block grant equivalent to the revenue forgone by the UK Government.”

The opposite applies to spending powers.

From that, it is clear that the transfer of additional powers should be matched by a change to the block grant. Theoretically, if we take that far enough, if it happened to be a year in which Scotland subsidised the UK, we might have to pay compensation, but if it is a year in which the UK does better, it might have to pay us.

Lewis Macdonald: Does Mr Mason acknowledge that the Smith agreement is written in terms of a position in which taxes and revenues are shared between the UK Government and the Scottish Government, and that full fiscal autonomy could not be more different from what is described in the Smith agreement?

John Mason: Full fiscal autonomy is a progression beyond that, but it can never be complete. We voted against independence. That was sad, in my opinion, but we voted to stay in the UK and be no better off. The no-detriment principle applies even if we are sharing to the extent that only VAT, defence and foreign affairs are excluded.

Theoretically, if Scotland was put at a net disadvantage after all the powers had been transferred, there is a commitment that the block grant would compensate. There is also the political issue that no Scottish Government or team would argue for powers that would leave us worse off. We would argue for powers that would leave us equally well off or better off through such things as high speed rail being brought right to Scotland.

That part is particularly straightforward as far as I am concerned. I suggest that it will become more complex post-devolution, but I will not go there today.

The Conservatives seem to suggest that the SNP might want more powers even if it meant that Scotland would be worse off, which is clearly nonsense and no one believes it.

We are debating the economy today. I hope that I have shown that, on our past record and as we look forward to the coming elections, it is only the

SNP that can be trusted with such an important area of ordinary people's lives.

15:43

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I begin by congratulating the SNP. We have done very well. We are more than an hour into the debate and SNP members are still managing to avoid giving the impression that they even understand the question that was set in the opening speech.

We have heard a lot of rubbish. We have heard the accusation that we think that Scotland is too wee and too poor, which simply causes offence on this side of the chamber and should cause offence to large numbers of people in Scotland. We have heard the accusation that we have a bad record and the SNP chooses to rely on its record, which was achieved under the fiscal discipline that was imposed by the Westminster Government and for which I have praised John Swinney many times.

Jackie Baillie was disgraceful in the way in which she attacked John Swinney. She suggested that he had somehow committed himself to Tory austerity simply by putting forward a budget that included the requirement to balance the budget within which he works. I have praised John Swinney in the past and I will do so again. He is a man who has done a great job in making limited money go as far as it can in Scotland.

That is why I find it extraordinary that that same man, who has done so well for so long under such pressure, is now prepared to put his name behind the policy of full fiscal autonomy and is not taking up the opportunity that he has to give us the numbers.

The truth is that the SNP is trying to exercise blind faith against real judgment. We have asked for the numbers. We know that full fiscal autonomy is possible. We know that, if we were to come to an agreement, Scotland could take charge of its fiscal future, yet we are suggesting that, as far as we can see, and in the view of a number of fiscal experts, when the numbers are placed on the table and the calculations are made, there is a black hole at the centre of those calculations.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Johnstone: No, I will not.

Today we have challenged the SNP to come up with an explanation for how that black hole would be filled. Time and again, we have taken interventions from people who, it might have been thought, could come with some numbers, but no—no numbers have been forthcoming.

Time and again, we have heard the cabinet secretary and members on his back benches say that, of course, we need the powers to address Scotland's fiscal position. They seem only too willing to take the powers without taking the true fiscal responsibility.

I hear what John Swinney has to say. I understand that a Scottish Government with full fiscal autonomy would be able to change the way in which Scotland is run in the future. It would have the opportunity—if it did the right things—to stimulate growth. However, there is a massive blind assumption at the centre of that argument, which is that all that growth and all that additional revenue would be with us very early in the process. Those of us who have studied and understood government and its finances over the years realise that that simply would not be the case.

A Scottish Government with full fiscal autonomy would wish to make changes to stimulate growth, but there would be an up-front cost. I do not know what that up-front cost would be, and I do not know what the policies of that Government would be, but there would be an up-front cost. Money would have to be invested in order to achieve the returns. Not only is there an apparent black hole at the centre of Scotland's finances; there is also the cost of that necessary investment.

We heard from John Swinney earlier that Scotland produces £1,600 more per person in revenue per year. I presume that that is overall productivity, or gross domestic product. Of course, that figure was based on a full geographical share of oil revenue, and we know that that oil revenue will be smaller over the next few years. John Swinney did not tell us how much of that £1,600 per person would have to be taken in tax in order to invest.

Last Thursday, we even heard the First Minister project that, in a few years' time, Scotland's total productivity or GDP could be up by £15 billion—I think that was the figure that she used. The irony is that more than half of that £15 billion in growth would be required to be taken in tax in order to begin to plug that black hole.

We are in a very lucky position. Scotland has a devolved Government but it has shared finances with the rest of the UK. That saves us from the impact of economic shocks such as the collapse in the oil price. As a result of that deal, we have a financial position that allows us to continue to have a national health service, to continue to have our welfare payments made, to continue to have pensions paid to our pensioners and to continue to have our young people educated.

However, the hole in our projections indicates that we could lose one or more of those things if

we make an error at this time. The challenge to the iron chancellor of Scotland is this: prove that you are not the cowboy or the gambler who is willing to borrow for a stake in Scotland's future. Prove that this is not a leap in the dark. Give us the numbers, and then we might start to believe you.

15:49

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): I will focus my comments on the amendment in the name of John Swinney, which I support.

Yet again, we are having an economy debate and another two and a half hours of talking down Scotland from the unionist parties. It is therefore important to ensure that some facts are highlighted in the debate. Scotland's economic expansion in the past quarter means that there have been two years of uninterrupted growth, Scotland is outperforming the UK with higher employment and lower unemployment, youth unemployment has fallen to its lowest level in five years, and female employment has increased to its highest recorded level.

Those facts clearly show that measures from the SNP Scottish Government are helping the economy. Those measures give us the most competitive business rate in the UK, and investment of £11 billion in Scotland's infrastructure for the three years from 2015-16. They will expand the level of funded childcare from 475 hours to 600 hours per annum, which helps people with young children to get back into the workplace, and they include the Scottish Government's activities to work towards the provision of 30,000 new modern apprenticeships per annum by 2020.

Those measures are significant, but they are also limited. The powers of this Parliament are limited, as Alex Johnstone said just a few moments ago. I am sure that if we had more powers—being independent or having fiscal autonomy—a Scottish Government could do more.

Today's debate is clearly focused on the Westminster election that is now under way. Obviously, Westminster policies have an effect upon all of us here in Scotland. Alex Johnstone talked about the "bad record", so let us consider some of the bad record of Westminster in recent years. The level of UK net borrowing to 2014-15 has exceeded the June 2010 forecast by more than £50 billion. George Osborne predicted in 2010 that the UK would by 2014-15 be running a surplus of about £5 billion on the structured current budget; he now expects to run a deficit of £46 billion. In the most recent budget, only a couple of weeks ago, the Tory-Lib Dem UK Government committed to a further £30 billion of

cuts by 2017-18, £12 billion of which is to come from welfare cuts.

The Tories and Lib Dems are not content that, in 2013-2014, they forced 71,428 people, of whom 22,000 were children, to food banks, or that women are bearing more than three quarters of the impact of tax and welfare changes, or that more than half of disabled people who claim disability living allowance will see their benefits cut by £1,000 per annum, or that the poorest 10 per cent of households are being hit the hardest, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. They want to inflict even more pain and misery on the households of Scotland.

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): Given that the SNP Government has committed to sticking to the Tory spending plans after the UK general election for the 2015-16 financial year, how would Mr McMillan tackle the issues that we need to tackle in Scotland, such as food banks, on which we cannot wait another year?

Stuart McMillan: I will come on to the point about continuing austerity measures, because they are something that the Labour Party has certainly signed up to time and again. The day after the budget, Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, said that he would not have changed anything in the budget.

The Child Poverty Action Group suggests that 100,000 more children will be pushed into poverty because of the Tory-Lib Dem plans, and that the poorest households will be worse off by £466 because of cuts in welfare. That figure is not mine—it comes from Her Majesty's Treasury's budget document itself. It is grim stuff; clearly the UK establishment is bad for people's health. The IFS is questioning where the axe will fall next in the welfare budget and says that no more than £2 billion of the cuts has been highlighted, so it is asking about the remaining £10 billion of cuts, which are to be in place by 2017-18. Time is running out.

I make no bones about highlighting the Westminster attack on the poorest people in society, because Labour has backed the Tories all the way. I had intended to comment on an earlier intervention but, unfortunately, Malcolm Chisholm is no longer in the chamber.

Gavin Brown: Will Stuart McMillan take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I have already taken an intervention.

Ed Balls gave the game away on the day after the budget, when he said in response to a question:

"there's nothing I'm saying to you from yesterday I would reverse."

There we have it. The Westminster parties—the Westminster elite, in fact—want Scotland to vote for business as usual. Being tied to the cuts that have already happened and those that are in the pipeline is a clear message to everyone who is on benefits or who is one of the working poor that they will be punished.

This is why Scotland needs more SNP MPs at Westminster—not to join the unionist establishment, but to help the people who need it most. If we do that to help Scots, we will also be able to help everyone across these islands. By sending more SNP MPs to Westminster, we might actually get the Smith proposals—and more—in order to help our constituents. Who knows? We might even provide a spine, which Labour sold a long time ago, to help to keep the Tories out of Downing Street.

Whether it is issue by issue or on the basis of confidence and supply, if Labour has a progressive conscience, it can do the correct thing for a change. However, the Westminster parties need to set out their detailed plans for welfare ahead of the election.

15:56

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Jackie Baillie was right: it is passing strange that we are debating the core demand of the SNP short of independence not in Government time but in Opposition time—yet again. Indeed, not only is the SNP reluctant to debate full fiscal autonomy, it is nearly incapable of pronouncing the words and has to find contorted euphemisms. Today, it is

“social and economic powers necessary to reflect the needs and preferences of the people of Scotland”,

and Mr Brown gave us an even more egregious example from earlier on. Truly, full fiscal autonomy is the policy that dare not speak its name, and no wonder, because it would leave Scotland with a fiscal black hole of £7.6 billion—£1,400 for every person in Scotland. That is equivalent to a 15p increase on every tax band, and it would cause the loss of 138,000 jobs.

Every aspect of the public finances, from education to health and from police to security would be jeopardised by that cut, and the detrimental effect would be felt not just by users of public services: the investments that we need to make in skills, innovation and infrastructure to support and grow our economy would be damaged, too.

Economists and commentators know that the figures are true. Peter Jones, in *The Scotsman*, called full fiscal autonomy “insanity”. It is such a crazy idea that it is clear that John Mason cannot quite bring himself to believe that it is the policy of the party that he represents.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

Will Iain Gray address the macroeconomic framework within which we operate as part of the UK? If he subscribes to the opinion that Scotland is incapable of standing on its own two feet financially, does he not shed some of the light of blame on the Westminster system within which we operate?

Iain Gray: I will come to that point in a moment. Let us stick for a moment with the consequences of full fiscal autonomy. The First Minister knows that they are true, as well. When they were put to her yesterday on the radio, she did not deny them. She said, “Don’t worry—it won’t happen just now.” That is the St Augustine defence: “Lord, grant me full fiscal autonomy, but grant me it not yet.” Nobody in the chamber has ever said that Scotland is too wee, too poor or too stupid except for SNP members. Right there, on the radio yesterday, the First Minister said that Scotland is not yet quite ready for those powers.

It is not the timing that is wrong with full fiscal autonomy—it is the principle. Pooling and sharing of resources is the best way to manage our economy and our public finances. It is not just about oil, although pooling and sharing is the best way to manage that kind of volatility, and it is not about the status quo. For Labour, it is also about a mansion tax, redistributing wealth across the UK, sharing in a 50p tax rate on 300,000 taxpayers and not just on 15,000, and taxing bankers’ bonuses in the City of London and not just the city of Edinburgh. Pooling and sharing will not only avoid the extra autonomy of fiscal autonomy, but will fund extra nurses, extra grants for students and extra resources to close the attainment gap in our schools.

Then, there is the other defence of fiscal autonomy: the “magic growth” defence. New powers will suddenly see productivity boom, exports surge and the population grow, and the economy will surge like an Asian tiger to levels that have never been seen in western Europe. As evidence for that, the cabinet secretary offered us the progress that has been made in recent years, but that progress is exactly the success of devolution: using the stability and additional resources that are made available by the very pooling and sharing of resources that the cabinet secretary seeks to dismantle.

The SNP has now managed to reduce the only clear economic policy that it had—a big corporation tax cut for big businesses—to ambiguity, with the First Minister spinning that she has dropped the policy and the cabinet secretary saying that he has not. How ironic it is, then, that the Government amendment asks for everyone else to lay out economic plans.

However, Labour is doing just that. The cabinet secretary knows that, because he has been borrowing our plans. For months we have been committed to a 50p tax rate. “No way”, said Alex Salmond, and “Read my lips: no tax rises.” Then last weekend, up pops Mr Swinney to announce a 50p tax rate. Today, Labour announced the policy that after 12 weeks in work no one can be forced to work on a zero-hours contract, which is a move towards a fairer country in which everyone shares in economic growth. I look forward to the imminent announcement by the SNP that that was always its policy and that it had just not mentioned it to us.

As for welfare, I heard the cabinet secretary say that he should be judged by his actions. The little bit of welfare that has been devolved in recent years—much more will come under the Smith commission recommendations—has seen 80 per cent of cash benefits replaced by vouchers and payment in kind. That is a harsh welfare reform and an SNP welfare reform. Is that the SNP’s plan?

We know what the policy of the SNP is, even if it will not talk about it. The SNP cannot admit it, because it knows that it would be a disaster.

16:02

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome today’s debate and its recognition that we seek full fiscal autonomy. I will focus on and demolish some of the shibboleths and foundations that are proposed in the motion. I said last week that the UK forecasts of tax receipts in Scotland by the Office for Budget Responsibility, which were fed into the Treasury and reflected in our funding by the UK, were nonsense. The OBR forecasts are the basis of not only the Treasury forecasts, but of those of some experts.

Members should listen to this: the current OBR report, which I looked at yesterday, says that its March 2012 report said that

“It is not possible to replicate in full the methodology we use to produce our UK-wide forecasts”

for Scottish tax receipts. Remember that those forecasts are also used by the experts. The March 2012 report said that

“the ... data that we would need to produce a Scottish macroeconomic forecast ... is generally not available”.

What did the OBR say yesterday? It said, “That remains the case.”

Despite that admission, the OBR of course continues to opine on oil and gas revenues showing a decline—despite the Brent crude barrel price today having risen by 11 per cent since its low earlier this year, and despite a commodities futures projection increase of 30 to 40 per cent by the middle of 2016. In fact, the Economy Forecast

Agency predicts a 100 per cent rise, and the bookies are never wrong.

On the OBR, why would we leave our fiscal determination and negotiation of meaningful full fiscal autonomy to that incompetent organisation, with its inability to forecast? Its narrowness of forecasting leaves other experts to come up with misplaced scenarios of impending economic doom that are built on a halfway house of partial Scottish Government receipts and the Barnett formula, but we are supposed to negotiate with it on full fiscal autonomy.

I will quote again what I quoted last week from Lord Barnett, especially for the benefit of Lewis Macdonald, who misquoted me. Lord Barnett himself said that in the event of Scotland getting more tax powers, retaining the Barnett formula would be “a terrible mistake.” That, of course, was then reflected in Jack McConnell’s prediction that new tax powers coming to Holyrood would diminish the Barnett formula.

Lewis Macdonald: Will Chic Brodie take an intervention?

Chic Brodie: No.

Do we believe that those people at least did not know the ultimate destination? Of course they did. However, we are where we are.

In invoking financial experts and their forecasts on the back of the OBR, I would prefer to listen, as I did this morning, to Jim McColl, who laid out his rationale for full fiscal autonomy on “Good Morning Scotland”. That timescale can and will be determined only after the discussion that we would need to have with the Treasury, of course.

Murdo Fraser: Will Chic Brodie give way?

Chic Brodie: No.

In respecting where we are, I must ask Gavin Brown and the Tories to accept that Scotland is not an economic basket case and that commentary of that sort would be best dealt with by looking at performance over a period of time, and not just at one moment.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Will Chic Brodie take an intervention?

Chic Brodie: No.

Over the past five years, excluding North Sea revenues as a percentage of GDP, Scotland has consistently had a higher revenue to GDP percentage than the rest of the UK. That is why the First Minister illustrated quite clearly and with confidence that growing the onshore economy by £15 billion by 2020 is very relevant. As the Deputy First Minister said, our tax receipts over the past 40 years have been higher than those of the rest of the UK. Therefore, we cannot look at just a one-

off scenario in which, for example, in 2014, operating costs in the oil and gas industry grew by 11 per cent—we all know why—and capital investment increased by 12 per cent, which reduced company tax liabilities. Of course, that will have a beneficial effect on future income.

Because of UK Government policy, there are other aspects to consider—in particular, changes in national insurance. I mentioned earlier the allocation of indefinable expenditure through the “Country and regional analysis: 2014”. Over the past five years, Scotland has been allocated £730 million for nuclear decommissioning, and it was allocated £263 million for the Olympics. Would not it be better if we decided our own revenue and expenditure? We have to be in a position in which we increase investment, innovation, exports and growth.

We have already shown the impact of non-North Sea oil activity on the base performance of Scotland. In the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee’s inquiry on exports and internationalisation, we showed how vital the impact of that is on our economy and its performance. The Government’s strategy is to increase exports by 50 per cent from 2010 to 2017. Over the first three years of that period we have, in fact, already increased exports by 20 per cent.

We can compare where we are with the position with the Smith recommendations and with full financial powers, and look at the office of the chief economic adviser report. Under the Smith recommendations, the impact of exports would increase GDP by 2.7 per cent, employment by 67,000 and tax revenues by £1.6 billion. With full financial powers, GDP would rise 3 per cent, employment would rise by 81,000 and tax revenues would rise by £1.7 billion. The same or similar comparisons would apply to the impact on further capital investment and improved productivity. There would be all of that and more without the beneficial impact of oil and gas in the North Sea, not to mention off the west coast and the Western Isles.

We have to ensure that we try to complete the journey on full fiscal autonomy as soon as we can, so that we can fully determine the economic destiny of our country.

16:08

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Presiding Officer, thank you for allowing me to participate in the debate. I apologise to members, including Gavin Brown, for not being able to be here for the start of it. I was in Turnberry—I never thought that I would go to Trump Turnberry—to take part in the Scottish Police Federation

conference. Unfortunately, the transport secretary’s road works delayed me on the way back up. I do not know whether he is here to apologise for that; nevertheless, I apologise to members for being late.

The motion is simple. Gavin Brown has made a simple request and posed a simple question. In all the debate about full fiscal autonomy, the finances of our country, economic growth and all the other matters, there is really just a simple question: can we have the publication of a document?

That is all that we are asking for—we are not making any judgments—and I think that SNP members could support Gavin Brown’s simple request. So far, however—and I have been listening carefully—not one single SNP member has indicated that it might be quite a good idea for us to know what the SNP’s plans are for the “Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin”.

We just want an updated document. However, the SNP says, “We don’t have all the information, the situation is unpredictable and we couldn’t possibly publish these things.” Thank goodness it is just an academic exercise; thank goodness we do not have an independent country; and thank goodness people decided not to vote yes last year, because neither the chamber nor the people of Scotland would be satisfied with such an excuse. They would want a bit more information to assure them that their independent Government knew what it was doing and what the projections for oil revenues were.

That proves the point that we made during last year’s referendum campaign. The resource is unpredictable and volatile; it is reducing over time; and it is difficult to make predictions about it. I would regard basing a country’s finances and economy on such a volatile, unpredictable and reducing resource as political folly, and I would not support such a move. Indeed, I think that that is why people in Scotland rejected the idea.

Perhaps the SNP’s failure to publish an updated oil and gas bulletin proves the point that we made last year—that the resource is unpredictable, uncertain and reducing over time. The SNP is too embarrassed to publish the document—that is how the debate should be summed up, and I am sure that Gavin Brown will reflect on that point when he sums up.

I point out that, although I question the plans of Labour-run Fife Council, I am not in favour of abolishing Fife. In criticising the plans of any UK Government, I make it clear that I am not in favour of criticising or abolishing the United Kingdom—and the same goes for the European Union. As a result, when I question the plans of the SNP Scottish Government, I am not saying that Scotland should be abolished or questioning its

existence. All that I am doing is my duty as a member of the Scottish Parliament to question the Government's plans, and to suggest otherwise is an insulting, tired and false position. The SNP needs to reflect on its tired, old rhetoric.

I was pleased that Mr Swinney recognised that in the budget the UK Government met the ambitions for the oil industry with the changes to the investment allowance, the supplementary charge and the petroleum revenue tax and with various tax-reduction measures to incentivise investment in the North Sea. I listened to Mr Swinney on the radio and, to his credit, he found it difficult to fault anything in the UK Government's plans. Those measures will cost the UK Treasury £1.3 billion, but they will return £4 billion of investment from the industry, resulting in 0.1 per cent of GDP for the UK. We have been able to do that within the framework of the UK, and not one penny has been cut from the Scottish Government's budget as a result of those measures.

Had we been independent, we would certainly have had to pay the price to get investment and growth back into the oil industry. Thank goodness we did not make that decision last year; if we had, we would not have had the flexibility and agility as part of the UK to do different things to get the oil industry moving again.

Jackie Baillie told us about the reality of the £7.6 billion of cuts that would be required—the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies has made that very clear, too. What we are not hearing any more with the publication of the GERS figures is the claim, set out in the SNP's favourite leaflet, that Scotland pays 9.6 per cent of the UK's taxes while getting 9.3 per cent of the UK's spend. I see that the 9.6 per cent has dropped to 8.6 per cent, but the 9.3 per cent has stayed exactly the same. I do not know whether the SNP will produce new figures in new leaflets—

Alex Johnstone: It is still using the old figures.

Willie Rennie: Mr Johnstone is absolutely right. The reality is that, even though the tax take from Scotland has fallen, not one penny of the Scottish Government's budget has been cut. That is the benefit of the pooling and sharing of resources across the UK.

The SNP says that this is all about the potential that we could have and that, if we had the economic levers, we could change everything. The one big economic lever that the SNP never stopped talking about during the referendum was corporation tax, but in not one of the many debates about the economy that we have had over the past few weeks has the SNP mentioned corporation tax. Perhaps that is because it has ditched its proposal, or perhaps it is because the

UK Government's plan created eight times as many jobs as the SNP's corporation tax proposal would have done, in a quarter of the time of that proposal.

The reality is that the SNP has no ideas and no plans. The party is bankrupt and it is time that its members shut up about full fiscal autonomy.

16:15

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I will pass on to the transport minister the fact that the road works that he put in place were not as effective as we might have hoped they would be.

Here we are again—it is another afternoon of depressing familiarity, as we discuss the Opposition parties' interpretation of our nation's financial sustainability. I am a fan of post-apocalyptic fiction as a genre, but only when it is well written and well delivered. Sadly, Mr Brown's entry into the genre did not quite stand up to either of those tests.

However, let me play devil's advocate—it is always fun to do so—and take Mr Brown's arguments at face value. He is a fully paid-up member of the UK fan club and believes that the UK system serves Scotland well. I questioned how well the UK system serves Scotland when I intervened on Mr Gray, but I did not catch the response that he said he would give later in his speech; perhaps he made a subtle reference that I missed.

If we accept at face value the prognosis of the economic situation as laid out by Mr Brown and so enthusiastically lapped up by Labour members, what does that say about the macroeconomic framework in which Scotland has operated over many years and in which it will continue to operate under Mr Brown's proposals and about the effect that that has had on the country's economic circumstances? If we take Mr Brown at his word and accept that Scotland's economy could not sustain full fiscal autonomy, surely that must be a damning commentary on the macroeconomic framework in which Scotland has operated. If his arguments are taken at face value, the conclusion that we must draw is that the UK is not serving Scotland well and that it is holding Scotland's economy back from performing to its full capabilities.

Mr Gray—who I see has had to leave the chamber—asserted that no one on the unionist side has said that Scotland is too wee or too poor. I am sorry to say so, but the implication of what the UK parties are saying is exactly that—that Scotland as a nation is too poor. That is the implication of the arguments that Mr Gray and those with whom his party occasionally fraternises continue to propagate—[*Interruption.*] I hear the

cabinet secretary saying that they fraternise frequently. It is becoming ever more difficult to tell the two parties apart.

The argument about pooling and sharing is put forward repeatedly. The way in which it was articulated by Mr Gray, who spoke about spending in Scotland money that is raised in London, was entirely designed to perpetuate the notion that we as a nation are subsidised and that we require other parts of the UK to subsidise Scotland. That is the direct implication of how he made his argument. The phoney war that has been going on between Mr Murphy and Diane Abbott and others in the London Labour party has been entirely about perpetuating the myth that Scotland is a subsidised nation. I thought that we had moved beyond that as a result of the referendum campaign, but it seems that the unionist parties have gone back to playing the same old songs.

Gavin Brown: What is the member's primary objection to John Swinney publishing the projections for full fiscal autonomy?

Mark McDonald: As Mr Brown may be aware, we have been consistently explicit about our belief that Scotland should have full control of its resources as an independent nation. We laid out the implications of that clearly in the white paper and during the referendum debate. Subsequently, we have made it clear that, in the framework of the UK, Scotland should have the opportunity to exercise fiscal autonomy.

I see that Murdo Fraser is sitting next to Mr Brown—at least I think he is; it is sometimes difficult to tell from the back of the chamber. Mr Fraser used to be an enthusiastic advocate of Scotland having fiscal autonomy. Indeed, he made many speeches to that effect. I am not sure what has made him change his mind; I am sure that he will be happy to share that with us. Furthermore, Willie Rennie—a man who believes in federalism and, I presume, in regions of the United Kingdom having financial accountability and autonomy in that context—seems also to disagree with the position that he previously sincerely held.

Iain Gray told us that the SNP has not put forward an economic plan. Perhaps he has been asleep for the past couple of weeks, because we have charted a clear plan to tackle the austerity agenda. We believe that that alternative agenda should be pursued.

The IFS, which has been quoted liberally in the debate, has stated that the Labour Party could sign up to our alternative agenda and still meet its proposals for deficit reduction. There is nothing to stop it doing so.

It is clear that we want Scotland as a nation to achieve its full potential. For that to happen, we must have control of all the powers that would

enable us to do that. We recognise and respect the referendum results and we recognise that we must operate in the United Kingdom framework. However, within that framework, we will never apologise for seeking the full extent of powers to realise Scotland's full potential.

16:21

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): It has been disappointing how some SNP members have chosen to talk down Scotland. When we are trying to have a serious discussion about important issues for Scotland's future, it is ridiculous for Mike MacKenzie to suggest that Scotland is too wee, too stupid and too poor and for Mark McDonald to talk about the unionists' position. As a proud Scot, I am very clear that I have all my life supported home rule for Scotland. I am not on the unionists' side; I am on Scotland's side. It is insulting to be attacked in such a way every time we try to ask serious questions.

I support Jackie Baillie's amendment. To pick up on Willie Rennie's point, her amendment

"calls on the Scottish Government to publish an updated *Outlook for Scotland's Public Finances* on the basis of full fiscal autonomy and an updated oil and gas analytical bulletin before the UK General Election".

If the Scottish Government is saying that it will not publish those documents, it should at least have the good grace to explain why.

The issue is so important. John Swinney talked about the £12 billion of welfare cuts that are to come and the damaging impact that they would have on Scotland. I agree entirely. I have no doubt that we would stand shoulder to shoulder to oppose such an approach to the economy. In last week's debate, I think that we agreed that there is nothing to celebrate in relation to where the economy is now. I was reminded of an editorial that I read in *The Herald* in July 2014, which said:

"The recovery has been a long time coming, longer than was necessary, and has some significant weaknesses. Conservative Party plans to gouge another £12 billion out of social security do not bode well.

Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the TUC"—

the Trades Union Congress—

"makes a fair point when she says that economic growth is driven by low pay and low productivity."

The election is as important for my constituents as it is for constituents across Scotland, because we know that the future will look pretty bleak if we are to have more failed austerity and billions of pounds-worth of welfare cuts. It is therefore legitimate, if there are concerns about full fiscal autonomy and if it is the view—a view that a lot of independent economic experts have expressed—that we would face a further deficit of £7.6 billion,

for any member of this Parliament to get to their feet and ask questions. That is all that we are doing.

Mark McDonald: I have a lot of time for Alex Rowley and the arguments that he makes. He mentions that he wants a reversal of some of the austerity cuts that are taking place. Does he support the proposal for a 0.5 per cent increase per annum in public expenditure, which would meet Labour's deficit reduction targets but would allow us to take an alternative approach to the austerity agenda that is being promoted?

Alex Rowley: I support the proposal to abolish the bedroom tax and use the £175 million in funding that is being used to mitigate its effect to create an anti-poverty fund in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament lacks a clear anti-poverty strategy coming from the Scottish Government, and we need that.

I am in favour of abolishing the UK Government's targets for benefit sanctions. I visited a food bank in Cowdenbeath yesterday, and I praise the work of the Trussell Trust and all the volunteers. However, we must find a way to tackle the underlying problems of poverty so that we can abolish food banks once and for all.

Mike MacKenzie: Earlier in his speech, the member called for a Scottish Government analysis of a fiscal position that, as Mr Swinney explained quite reasonably, would not come about for some years—although I hope that it would be sooner than six years. Given that Gordon Brown did not see the credit crunch coming until it happened, I wonder whether the Tories and the Labour Party—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Come to the point, please.

Mike MacKenzie: —have some kind of crystal ball that allows them to predict the future with that degree of precision. Perhaps—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is enough. Mr Rowley, I will give you an extra minute.

Alex Rowley: It was a good thing that Gordon Brown was in power when the credit crunch came, because he was able immediately to take the necessary steps to see us through that, as history shows.

It has been suggested—including by Gavin Brown in moving his motion today—that full fiscal autonomy will mean fundamental change for Scotland and a £7.6 billion deficit. Indeed, he went further and said that the deficit would rise year on year to almost £9 billion, not in five years' time but in three years' time. What would that mean? It would mean massive cuts to public services in Scotland and massive cuts in the economic programme to get Scotland moving forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close now, please.

Alex Rowley: If there are serious questions to be answered, it is surely the right of every member of the Parliament to ask the Government to answer those questions, and that is all that we are doing today.

16:28

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Sometimes, I just shake my head. It is obvious from the speeches by the unionist parties that there is a general election just around the corner. I sometimes think that they protest too much.

Alex Rowley: That is scandalous.

Sandra White: Even from a sedentary position, they protest too much.

Alex Rowley said that members have every right to question, and they do have every right to do that, regardless of what political party they belong to and whether they are unionists or otherwise, but so do back benchers from the Government's party. I have a right to ask questions of the Labour Party, such as why, during the referendum, it phoned old-age pensioners and sent them letters telling them that they would not get their pensions in an independent Scotland. I have a right to get a reply about that. I also have a right to get a reply for the many people in my constituency who are of Polish and other origins who were told by the Labour Party and others, via phone calls, that they would be deported if they turned up to vote in the referendum.

I did not want to go down that road again, but the unionist parties are getting together again to talk Scotland down, just as they did during the referendum. I did not want to have to repeat that, but that is what they are doing constantly to frighten people. They frightened people during the referendum and they are frightening them once again. I honestly do not understand that psyche, and the Scottish people do not understand it either. When the Scottish people look at them, those parties will pay the price not just for what they did during the referendum but for what they are trying to do now. When they tell people in their own country that they are not genetically programmed to think politically, there is something sadly wrong not with the people of this country but with the political parties that say that.

Willie Rennie: Sandra White is a master of digression. Is she in favour of publishing the oil and gas bulletin?

Sandra White: That will happen and I am in favour of it. However, it is quite funny that Mr Rennie did not put forward his policies. That shows that Scotland puts more money into the

Westminster Treasury than we get back out. When is he going to produce his policies? When is he going to tell the Scottish people the truth: that we are not too poor? We do not need the lies that he tells—I am sorry, Presiding Officer; I should not have said that. We do not need the untruths that were told during the referendum—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You might wish also to confine yourself to the terms of the motion and the amendment, please.

Sandra White: Yes—I would have liked that to happen to some other people, but never mind, Presiding Officer; I take that on board.

It was never my intention to start my speech off like this, but I cannot sit and listen to the unionist parties constantly saying that Scotland needs the United Kingdom to survive. We can survive perfectly well on our own, as I am sure they will find out on 7 May this year.

I want to go back to what the motion says. Let us look at some of the key points about full responsibility, fiscal autonomy or whatever we want to call it. With full responsibility, Scotland's resources would be given to the Scottish Parliament. We would then be able to respond to the challenges and the austerity measures that are coming from Westminster—and, although it may deny it, the Labour Party supports the austerity measures that the Tory party has put forward. Let us put that one to rest—it supports them. Billions of pounds of cuts will come to the Scottish people regardless of whether it is the Labour Party or the Tory party that is in power in Westminster.

I want to put forward some of the arguments that we put forward at various meetings. If we had full responsibility over taxes, welfare and so on, we could look at the economy and jobs; we could create more jobs for the Scottish people; and we could protect their rights in the workplace, which we asked the Smith commission to deliver, although it did not.

Another issue that we have to look at is the so-called vow that the people of this country were promised by all three unionist party leaders. They did not get that vow delivered. That is something else that those parties have to answer to the Scottish people for.

We could also look at equality. It cannot be right that the people with the most money get the most. We have to look after our vulnerable people. Everybody should be treated the same. Not a lot of people have mentioned that issue today.

If the Scottish Government held the power, there would be a positive impact on GDP, and employment and tax revenues would be significantly increased. The Smith report set out steps to improve the economy. However, do those

plans really benefit Scotland? They could benefit Westminster more than they do Scotland.

The report talks about plans to create 11,000 jobs in Scotland, and the estimated revenue from them would be £400 million. That sounds really good. The money, however, would not come to Revenue Scotland; it would go to Westminster.

If we want to have control over those issues and to create employment and a fair society, we have to have the power over revenues and the economy.

I see the Presiding Officer nodding at me. I have only a couple of seconds to finish.

We need to have the powers over welfare as well. As Alex Rowley said, there are people going to food banks in what is a rich country—I am talking about not just Scotland but Britain. There are more and more food banks, and there are people on the streets, as has been said before, who are homeless. Why is that? If we have control over our economy, we can do things differently, for the benefit of the Scottish people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the closing speeches.

16:29

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Here we are again, with another debate on the economy and on the choices facing Scotland, and another opportunity for SNP ministers to spell out the implications of their flagship policy of full fiscal autonomy. It is another chance for the Scottish Government to tell voters just what they will get if they vote SNP. However, what is most striking is how little ministers have had to say on full fiscal autonomy.

John Swinney's amendment fails to use those words at all. Instead, as Iain Gray pointed out, it says:

"Scotland requires the social and economic powers necessary to reflect the needs and preferences of the people of Scotland".

In other words, it says that Scotland needs the powers that Scotland needs in order to meet the needs of Scotland. A polite way of describing that would be to say that it is a tautology, but it might be more like it to say that it is stringing words together that mean nothing in order to avoid saying anything. At 3 o'clock this afternoon, John Swinney was challenged by Jackie Baillie to say how he proposed to fill the funding gap of £7.6 billion a year after the abolition of Barnett. He sat down six minutes later, having offered absolutely no detailed explanation of how Barnett formula funding could be replaced overnight.

John Swinney was also challenged about when the SNP wants to achieve full fiscal autonomy by, and he said that that would have to be negotiated with somebody else. Perhaps he can now tell us his negotiating position. When would he like to achieve full fiscal autonomy by? Perhaps he does not want to tell us. Perhaps he agrees with Mike MacKenzie that full fiscal autonomy should not happen any time before 2021. When the SNP was challenged on its support for Tory spending plans in the new financial year, Linda Fabiani said that that is all right, because it is too late to do anything about it. What a contrast with Labour's position, confirmed by Ed Balls in Glasgow today, that if we win in May, he will use his first budget to begin to end Tory austerity, with £800 million of extra spending in Scotland, which will be brought in as early as possible. If only we could have something as clear and straightforward from the SNP.

For example, the SNP could say that it would support that Labour budget if it had the opportunity to do so. After all, at the weekend, John Swinney said that the SNP would support Labour's policy of a 50p top rate of tax after all. Perhaps there are more U-turns to come and more areas on which the SNP will come round to supporting Labour's plans. However, if so, it has a lot of catching up to do. Perhaps, like Mark McDonald, the SNP regards any proposals to raise taxes in London to pay for services in Scotland as a cunning ploy to promote Scottish dependency on England. That is surely a revealing insight into the peculiar world that some members of the SNP inhabit.

Mark McDonald: Does the member believe that Scotland is or requires to be subsidised?

Lewis Macdonald: I know, and I hope that Mr McDonald knows and understands, that the Barnett formula provides additional public spending per head in Scotland and has done so for many years. I know that the funding gap that has been created now is growing and growing and that the SNP has brought forward no proposals to fill it.

If SNP ministers do not want to talk about full fiscal autonomy or scrapping the Barnett formula, they can always get others to do it for them. Last week, we heard from SNP backbenchers that full fiscal autonomy does not matter much because, after all, it will not happen tomorrow. Today, when SNP deputy leader Stewart Hosie was asked by Andrew Neil about the same issue, his answers were revealing. He said:

"I think that would be impossible to do within the year".

He said:

"we are not at the position where we are talking about that today".

He also said:

"So the timeframe even if it's two, two and a half years, it sounds fine but we're talking into the future, you wouldn't do something like that in two or three weeks".

Then up pops Jim McColl on today's "Good Morning Scotland" to offer his version of full fiscal autonomy. As has been said, he acknowledged the funding gap, but his answer to the Barnett formula question and the black hole created by full fiscal autonomy is simply to borrow the billions of pounds that are required to make up the difference, with the Scottish Government getting to keep all the taxes that are raised in Scotland and the block grant from the UK Government at the same time. That is surely a risk to Scotland's public services, now and in the longer term. It is still uncoded and still fuelled by wishful thinking, but it is the nearest thing yet to an explanation of what the SNP leadership is really trying to achieve from this election campaign. Perhaps if SNP ministers endorse the McColl version of full fiscal autonomy, they can tell us how much they want the Scottish Government to borrow to pay for it and at what on-going cost.

Ministers really need to address those issues. They need to be open with voters and tell them that full fiscal autonomy actually means scrapping the Barnett formula, which supports Scotland's public services. They need to acknowledge that a black hole of £7.6 billion must mean real cuts in public services, either to address the deficit now or to pay back the borrowing if the pain is put off until later. They also need to be open with voters that they have no ambition to add a single penny to Tory spending plans for the new financial year.

The nearer we get to polling day, the harder it will become for Mr Swinney and his colleagues to disguise the consequences of their policies.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member give way?

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

Lewis Macdonald: The more voters know about those consequences, the more they will choose real change by voting Labour.

16:40

John Swinney: Even by the standards of Jackie Baillie's contorted arguments, the argument that she advanced today—that, by setting a budget within the financial limit, as we are required to do, the Scottish Government is somehow surrendering control over our ability to set a budget—was quite ludicrous. In fact, I did not follow the argument until Alex Johnstone explained it for me, and it is some day indeed when it takes Alex Johnstone to explain Jackie Baillie's contorted arguments to me.

The public in Scotland would be really quite surprised if I did not set a budget within the limits that are prescribed under the existing financial framework of the United Kingdom. After all, that would somewhat injure my reputation for financial stewardship in the eyes of Alex Johnstone, which has been very precious to me over the years.

The argument from Jackie Baillie was, frankly, one of the most ridiculous arguments that I have heard her peddle in this Parliament in many years.

I want to say a little about Malcolm Chisholm's challenge to me regarding the process of fiscal consolidation. There are three facts on which I think he and I should be able to agree. Point 1 is that the Labour Party has signed up to the charter for budget responsibility, for which the Conservatives also voted. Point 2 is that the charter requires £30 billion of fiscal tightening in 2016-17 and 2017-18, so the Labour Party—along with the Conservatives—has signed up to £30 billion-worth of fiscal consolidation over those two financial years.

Point 3, on which I hope Malcolm Chisholm and I can agree, is that the proceeds of the mansion tax, the 50p tax rate, the bank levy, the bankers' bonus tax, the changes to pensioners' tax relief and the tobacco levy will between them generate less than £10 billion over 2016-17 and 2017-18. That leaves £20 billion of fiscal tightening that is yet to be identified by the glorious Labour Party.

There we have it: there is the black hole—the bombshell at the heart of the Labour Party's fiscal policies. We have not heard much about all that today.

I simply say to Malcolm Chisholm that it is necessary for the Labour Party to stop saying to people that somehow it is doing anything other than perpetuating, in this forthcoming United Kingdom general election campaign, a continuation of its happy better together alliance with the Conservatives to take £30 billion out of public expenditure as a consequence of its decisions.

Malcolm Chisholm: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Lewis Macdonald: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: I had better give way to Malcolm Chisholm because I have just mentioned him.

Malcolm Chisholm: Forgive me for saying so, but I notice that John Swinney is still reluctant to talk about full fiscal autonomy. If he listened to the full first half of my speech, he will know that I dealt with all the issues that he mentioned. The simple summary is that the Labour Party is not signed up to the Conservative Party's cuts. The IFS has

pointed to the £30 billion gap between Labour spending plans and Conservative spending plans.

John Swinney: I think that Mr Chisholm was in the chamber when I spoke about fiscal autonomy earlier today; I will come on to say more about it.

Mr Chisholm cannot escape the three facts that I have put on the record. The first two facts align the Labour Party with the Conservative's spending—and spending reduction—plans, and the third demonstrates that the Labour Party has still to set out where £20 billion-worth of fiscal tightening is to come from. That is a very significant issue.

Willie Rennie commented on the oil and gas tax changes, and he fairly recorded the fact that I publicly encouraged before the budget, and welcomed after it, the changes to taxation that the UK Government has made. However, I gently point out that one of the changes to taxation was to remove the supplementary charge increases that the chancellor put in place in 2011. It cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as an example of sensible stewardship of North Sea oil and gas revenues that those were applied in the first place.

Mr Rennie made the point that those measures cost £1.3 billion and that that is a huge sum of money that only the United Kingdom could afford. However, to give one example, in 2011-12, North Sea oil and gas revenues increased by £2.5 billion. In one year, revenues went up by £2.5 billion, but Mr Rennie is making a big thing about the £1.3 billion capped cost of the oil and gas tax changes.

In the same year that the oil and gas revenues went up by £2.5 billion, the Scottish Government's budget was cut by £900 million. My point in putting that information on the record is to illustrate that there are years of financial strength in which Scotland has contributed significantly but in which we have had to face cuts, despite the strong financial contribution that we have made to the UK Treasury.

Willie Rennie: If Mr Swinney is so confident, why does he not just publish the bulletin? All that we are asking for is that he should just publish it.

John Swinney: The Government has said that it will publish the bulletin once we have completed all the analysis that is required. That is the answer—we have said it, and it is not some great revelation; it is something that the First Minister has told Parliament on countless occasions.

Mr Rennie also claimed that Scottish tax revenues had collapsed and were projected to collapse. None of the data that I have in front of me about the performance of Scottish taxes from 2013-14 into 2014-15 shows anything other than a

growth in taxes in Scotland, so I do not know what point Mr Rennie was making in that respect.

The heart of the debate is about how we obtain the economic powers that enable us to strengthen and improve Scotland's economic performance. That is what the debate is about. We have demonstrated—I did so in my opening speech—a number of examples where, by exercising our devolved responsibilities, we have increased exports, improved research and development spending and improved Scottish productivity, which moved from 6 per cent lower than the UK to almost the same level as the UK.

By having distinctive and different policy levers in Scotland, we can deliver better outcomes and better performance. The Scottish Government's proposition is that we could do that to a greater extent with a fuller range of powers and responsibilities.

Gavin Brown: I am grateful to Mr Swinney for giving way. He has published a partial analysis. Will he commit today in the chamber to the Scottish Government publishing a full analysis of the full fiscal autonomy projections?

John Swinney: I have said that we will publish the oil and gas bulletin, which is exactly what Mr Rennie asked us to do. That is what the First Minister has made clear.

Let me make a final point about the nature of the analysis that we are talking about in the debate that we are having. I used this quotation earlier: the Institute for Fiscal Studies has indicated that

"full fiscal autonomy would give ... freedom to pursue different, and perhaps better fiscal policy, and to undertake the radical, politically challenging reforms that could generate additional growth. There are undoubtedly areas where existing UK policy could be improved upon."

None of the miserable analysis provided by the Liberal party or the Labour Party—

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

John Swinney: No, I think that I have to draw my remarks to a close.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can give way if you wish to.

John Swinney: In that case, of course.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the cabinet secretary for taking an intervention. He is keen to quote the IFS. Does he therefore also understand that the IFS is saying that the cost of full fiscal autonomy this year is £7.6 billion? It is £7.6 billion. Does he agree with that figure—yes or no?

John Swinney: There are two points that Jackie Baillie has to take into account. The first is that, in 2015-16, Scotland will not have fiscal

autonomy. That is the reality of the situation. The second is that the IFS analysis is predicated on making absolutely no judgment other than that if we have wider financial levers at our disposal, we can deliver better economic performance. I am prepared to rest my case on the talent and the capability of the people of Scotland to do better than the miserable unionist bunch has ever done at running our economy.

16:49

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I need to start with a confession. This is for the benefit of Mark McDonald. In 1998 I co-authored, along with Michael Fry and Peter Smail, a pamphlet for the Tuesday Club called "Full Fiscal Freedom for the Scottish Parliament". It was written long before this Parliament was even constituted. It was written so long ago that I cannot even remember how much pink champagne we drank in the process of writing it—although, knowing Michael Fry, it was probably quite a lot.

I came to the conclusion many years ago that full fiscal autonomy is not the best way for Scotland to go. That is for two reasons. First, the version of full fiscal autonomy proposed by the SNP—which, as far as I know, is that all tax revenues are collected by this Parliament, we fund all spending in Scotland and we pay a sum to Westminster for some minor reserved items that the SNP wishes to see, such as defence and foreign affairs—simply does not exist as a model anywhere on the planet. The closest example is the Basque Country in Spain but, even there, there is an element of control of tax levels from Madrid.

There is a very good reason why there is no precedent, which is that such a system is simply unworkable. In any constitutional arrangement, in any country, there should be a sharing and pooling of resource. Iain Gray made that point earlier. The stronger parts of the country can help the weaker and, in bad times, the richer areas can help the poorer. That concept of pooling and sharing resource underpins the financial arrangements in devolved and federal countries across the world.

That is why there are bodies such as the Australian grants commission, which operates within a federal system to reallocate resources from the richer areas to the poorer. There is no federal country in the world that operates full fiscal autonomy as proposed by the SNP. It is not a workable proposition; it is simply a route to independence by a different name.

There is a second reason why full fiscal autonomy makes no sense, which is because of the fiscal gap that would be created. The analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that that

would be £7.6 billion by 2015-16—a gap that would need to be filled by borrowing, tax increases, cuts in spending or a combination of all three.

We have heard nothing from the SNP, in the past two hours and 20 minutes, about how that gap would be filled. I exempt from that only John Mason, who at least made a brave attempt to explain it—and it was brave—by claiming that we could have full fiscal autonomy but also keep the Barnett formula. That is arguing for two opposite outcomes at once. Mr Mason, it is called full fiscal autonomy for a reason. The clue is in the word “full”. Believe me, I know what it means. I once wrote a pamphlet about it.

As set out in Gavin Brown’s motion, there is no doubt that full fiscal autonomy would be immensely damaging for the Scottish economy. What we are calling for today, as Willie Rennie confirmed, is simply a set of modest proposals. All that we are asking is for the Scottish Government to update its projections for the public finances to reflect its current policy. We are asking it to publish an updated oil and gas analytical bulletin and that the Scottish Fiscal Commission—supposedly a body independent of government—does the necessary work.

Mike MacKenzie: Does the member share my disappointment that we are almost at the end of a debate entitled “Scotland’s economy and finances”, and we have not heard one positive thing from the UK party about Scotland’s economy or what its hopes and plans for that, and improving it, might be.

Murdo Fraser: The UK economy is projected to be the fastest-growing economy in the western world in the years to come. What could be more positive than that? The member wants to take us away from that.

I am disappointed that the SNP and Mr Swinney reject our modest calls this afternoon. The SNP will be standing candidates for election in just five weeks’ time on a platform of supporting full fiscal autonomy. Surely the people have a right to know what that means. Why is the Scottish Government so reticent about publishing the detail of its policy? One would think that it would be keen to publish it so that people can be well informed, yet it seems strangely reluctant to talk about its consequences.

The SNP’s proposition seems to be that we can grow our way out of the fiscal deficit by growing our economy faster—even faster than the UK economy is projected to grow over the coming years. That will be some growth. If it wants to do that, though, it would help if it set out exactly what policies it intends to follow to deliver that dramatic level of economic growth.

Until a few weeks ago, the flagship SNP policy was clear. The way to grow the economy, the SNP told us, was to attract more large companies to invest in Scotland, and the way to do that was to cut corporation tax by three pence in the pound. I remember all the debates I had with Mr Swinney and others throughout the referendum campaign in which that policy was paraded as the panacea to all our economic ills. Now, of course, it has been quietly shelved. Under the stewardship of Nicola Sturgeon, there will be no more sweeteners for large multinational companies. Amazon and Google will have to take their corporate headquarters elsewhere.

What will replace that measure? What is being proposed to deliver such a miraculous level of economic growth? How will we raise the extra money to fill the £7.6 billion fiscal gap? We are still on tenterhooks awaiting that announcement. When I intervened on Mr Swinney earlier, he promised to come back and tell me how he will fill that gap and we are still waiting.

It is no wonder that the SNP does not want to talk about the policy. Malcolm Chisholm was right: in this weekend’s conference speech from Nicola Sturgeon, there was no mention of full fiscal autonomy. She did not get off the hook when she was on “Good Morning Scotland” yesterday. She said that she

“would want to see Scotland moving to a position of fiscal autonomy. That’s not gonnae happen overnight. That will happen over a period of time.”

We can picture the protest marches and the massed ranks of the SNP going down Whitehall with their placards: “What do we want?” “Full fiscal autonomy.” “When do we want it?” “Not now.” If Mike MacKenzie is there, it will be: “When do we want it?” “In six years’ time.” That will not capture the public imagination. The SNP told us that we could be a fully independent country in 18 months, but it will take six long years to deliver fiscal autonomy.

The fact is that the SNP is all over the place on this issue. How do we know that it is in trouble? At one point this afternoon, Mr Swinney had to be bolstered on the front bench by no fewer than four ministerial colleagues. I have never seen a situation in the chamber when there were more people on the SNP front bench than there were back benchers behind the cabinet secretary. It is just as well that they were not all asked to make a speech in the debate because we would probably have heard five different contributions. It shows just how weak Mr Swinney’s position is on this particular issue.

If the Government thinks that its position is so strong, why does it not publish its analysis and show the effect of full fiscal autonomy on the Scottish economy and public finances? It will not

even let its placemen in the Scottish Fiscal Commission do the necessary work because it recognises the negative impact of full fiscal autonomy. The Government does not want to talk about this policy.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I give way to Mr McDonald.

Mark McDonald: I thank the member for giving way. At least one of us has managed to leave the university debating society behind. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order. Let us hear Mr McDonald.

Mark McDonald: If Mr Fraser's prognosis for the Scottish economy is correct, perhaps he can advise whether he considers that the UK macroeconomic framework has been good or bad for Scotland.

Murdo Fraser: I only heard part of that, such was the hilarity around me at Mr McDonald's contribution. He cannot deny that, under a Conservative Government, the UK economy is growing strongly, Scotland has benefited from that growth and we should not put that at risk.

We have an election coming up on 7 May. Despite all the manoeuvring, back-pedalling and shilly-shallying on this issue, a vote for SNP candidates in that election is a vote for full fiscal autonomy and a vote to create a black hole in the public finances of £7.6 billion per annum. We know that the SNP will not do a deal with the Conservatives and that it is only interested in propping up a Miliband Government, with a Labour leader who is so weak that he will have to give in to the SNP's every demand to get the key to Downing Street. That would be a disaster for Britain, and an even greater disaster for Scotland.

Only the Conservatives have the strength to stand up against the combined forces of Labour and the SNP and the danger that they present to Scottish public finances and Scottish taxpayers.

The proposals in Gavin Brown's motion are modest and reasonable. Who could be more modest and reasonable than Mr Brown? Our motion does not condemn full fiscal autonomy and it does not denounce its advocates. We call for something simple: the publication of some research. During the debate this afternoon, not one SNP speaker addressed the key point in Gavin Brown's motion. Not one argument was heard against publication of the requested information. Even now, in the closing seconds of my speech, I appeal to the good grace of all the reasonable people on the SNP back benches to give the Scottish people the information that they need: what are you afraid of?

Point of Order

17:00

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This is indeed a point of order but, for a change, you will not be asked who was right and who was wrong in today's debate.

I was grateful, as I am sure other members were, for a copy of the text of your speech to the David Hume Institute this week on the subject of parliamentary reform. A great many members and many people outside the Parliament recognise that we need to do scrutiny better in the Parliament, and that you are right to raise the issue of reform.

I believe that at whatever pace the debate continues and in whatever direction it goes—there will be a range of views about that—it is important to be subject to some degree of public, transparent scrutiny.

Motions and the subject may be discussed at the Parliamentary Bureau, but the bureau does not meet in public or on the record. What process do you have in mind for some public and transparent debate on the matter, which includes all members and others with an interest in the quality of the scrutiny that the Parliament provides?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I thank Patrick Harvie for advance notice of his point of order. As the member will have noted from my speech on Monday, I gave my personal view on changes that I think we could make. To date, I have had discussions with the Conveners Group, business managers and colleagues from across the Parliament.

At this stage, I am seeking the views and ideas of all members. I would very much welcome input from Mr Harvie or any other colleagues. My office is available at all times.

Business Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12884, 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 21 April 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Contribution of Culture, Visitor Attractions and Events to Scotland's Economy and Society

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 April 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by European and External Relations Committee Debate: EU Engagement and Scrutiny of the Committees of the Scottish Parliament on European Union policies 2015-16

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Members' Interests Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 April 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 Stage 1 Debate: Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 28 April 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 April 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 30 April 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 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-12882, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised timetable for the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 29 May 2015.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12883, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Smoking Prohibition (Children in Motor Vehicles) (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Smoking Prohibition (Children in Motor Vehicles) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 9 October 2015.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S4M-12885 and S4M-12886, on the May day holiday and the spring bank holiday.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Wednesday 6 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 1 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on 13 and 14 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 1 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 5 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 5 May.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 28 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 26 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 3 and Thursday 4 June should end at 4.30pm on Thursday 21 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 26 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 26 May.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:03

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

The first question is, that amendment S4M-12857.2, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12857, in the name of Gavin Brown, on Scotland's economy and finances, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)

Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 41, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-12857.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12857, in the name of Gavin Brown, on Scotland's economy and finances, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

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

Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 23, Against 81, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12857, in the name of Gavin Brown, on Scotland's economy and finances, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 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)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 40, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that the Scottish Government seeks to achieve full fiscal autonomy for Scotland; recognises that Scotland requires the social and economic powers necessary to reflect the needs and preferences of the people of Scotland; notes that being tied to the UK Government's austerity plan and welfare cuts is having a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable in society; believes in an alternative to this approach that would protect vital investment in public services and develop a fair and sustainable economy, and calls on the UK parties to set out in detail their plans for taxation and welfare ahead of the general election.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-12885, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the May day holiday, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Wednesday 6 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 1 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on 13 and 14 May should end at 12 noon on Friday 1 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 5 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 5 May.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that S4M-12886, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the spring bank holiday, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 28 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 26 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 3 and Thursday 4 June should end at 4.30pm on Thursday 21 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 26 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 26 May.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Autism

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12446, in the name of Mark McDonald, on making Scotland autism friendly. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that World Autism Awareness Week takes place between 27 March and 2 April 2015, with World Autism Awareness Day taking place on 2 April; further notes the ongoing work of the Scottish Strategy for Autism; welcomes investment in new resources, such as the autism toolbox for schools; commends recent initiatives for providing relaxed cinema and theatre performances and applauds efforts to increase the number of facilities qualifying for the Autism Access Awards administered by the National Autistic Society; considers that work still needs to be done to improve attitudes and understanding regarding people with autism, for example in increasing opportunities for employment, and supports the ongoing work of a range of organisations to create greater awareness to help make Scotland a truly autism-friendly nation.

17:09

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

I begin by thanking those members from across the chamber who signed the motion that we are debating this evening. I welcome our guests from the National Autistic Society Scotland and from Autism Initiatives, who are in the gallery, and I am aware that a number of people will also be watching the debate via the live streaming function.

Earlier today, I attended a short ceremony to hand over a plaque to the Scottish Parliament. The autism access award is awarded to organisations that have taken steps to make themselves accessible to individuals on the autistic spectrum. The Scottish Parliament is the first public building in Scotland to achieve that award, which is a great testament to the efforts of the staff of the Parliament. *[Applause.]* It was great to be there and to meet some of the Parliament's autism champions. The award is a great credit to them. I am aware that work will be undertaken throughout the Parliament to increase awareness and understanding of autism among members of staff.

Tomorrow is world autism awareness day. It is important that, during world autism awareness week, we take the opportunity to highlight and celebrate the good work that is being done but also to outline our goals and our aspirations to go further and do better in the areas where we want to see improvement. The motion is framed in a way that reflects the fact that we want to set an ambitious target for Scotland.

Let us look at some of the good work that is being done. The autism toolbox is being rolled out as a resource to be used in our schools, and that is being welcomed by both parents and teachers throughout Scotland. We have had a number of relaxed performances in our theatres and cinemas, which have opened up cultural experiences to people who for too many years found themselves excluded from being able to enjoy things that the rest of us take for granted, including things as basic as the Christmas pantomime.

We have also had the production of local autism strategies across Scotland within the wider framework of the Scottish strategy for autism. I think that we would all agree that some local authorities took that forward a little bit quicker than others, but nonetheless progress has been made across Scotland, and it is worth recognising that.

On Friday, which was the first day of world autism awareness week, I attended part of the National Autistic Society Scotland conference, which took place in Aberdeen. At that event, the society launched its campaign for an autism-friendly Aberdeen, which is its bid to get Aberdeen to be the first city in the United Kingdom to be recognised as autism friendly. That will involve a range of work being done across both the public and private sectors to increase awareness and understanding in order to make services more receptive and open for people on the autistic spectrum, and it will also deliver wider benefits beyond that.

To achieve that outcome, we need to look at where the challenges are arising and where there is still work to be done. For example, I know from both my personal experiences with my son and the experiences of other parents with whom I have come into contact that we are seeing some improvements with getting early diagnosis, but when we look at diagnosis for older children, particularly into the teenage years, and crucially for adults, we are still seeing some difficulties with the ability to obtain a diagnosis and the length of time that it takes to diagnose. Also, it is still the case that too many people—27 per cent in 2013—say that they feel that they were misdiagnosed initially. We have to look at how we can get better at diagnosis.

The National Autistic Society Scotland's 2013 report "Count us in: it pays to listen" states that 61 per cent of the respondents to its survey said that they felt relieved once they had been given a diagnosis. A diagnosis can open up opportunities to access support that are not available without a diagnosis. I will perhaps come back to that later and comment on other things that need to be done.

On employment and employability, I have heard testimony from individuals who have found themselves excluded from the jobs market as a consequence of their autism when, in fact, subtle changes to the workplace or indeed recognition of the strengths and talents of individuals on the autistic spectrum can allow employers to gain members of staff who will make a big contribution to their workforce and their business. Some employers are good at offering employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities in general, but employers could do more to support individuals on the autistic spectrum into employment.

The final area that I have seen during my campaign work and through the testimonies that I have received concerns the transitions that take place when the responsibility for an individual goes from children's services to adult services or from adult services to older people's services.

It is often felt that the view of many organisations is that autism is something that affects children. We need to break down some of those perceptions and make organisations understand that, although the support that an individual requires in childhood will not necessarily need to be absolutely mirrored, it cannot simply be radically altered at the point at which they move to being the responsibility of adult services. We also need to make sure that there is a clear path for individuals as they move through the different age brackets in which social care services address their needs.

Wider benefits can be realised as a result of Scotland becoming more autism friendly. First, a recognition and understanding of sensory issues will benefit people who are not on the autistic spectrum but who have associated conditions. One group that has come to my Facebook page today is individuals who have children or relatives who have been diagnosed with pathological demand avoidance, which is associated with autistic spectrum disorder but does not always get the support that they feel it deserves.

Secondly, minor adjustments can lead to major differences and major benefits. That needs to be emphasised to employers, private sector organisations and public sector bodies. We are not talking about them needing to make drastic changes to the way in which they deliver services or operate in relation to customer services. Often, minor adjustments make a major difference to the individual who is affected.

Thirdly, getting more people on the autistic spectrum into employment and sustaining it will have great benefits to the wider economy through the increase in productivity and in employment.

It will be challenging for us to get there, but I see no reason why it should be unachievable. If we have the will, we can get there and I hope that the Scottish Government will be on board with the ambitious campaign to make Scotland an autism-friendly nation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This afternoon, the Presiding Officer was delighted to receive on behalf of the Parliament the autism access award to which Mr McDonald referred. I am also pleased to put on the record that it is a great tribute to all the Scottish Parliament staff who have worked so hard to make it possible. *[Applause.]*

17:17

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Mark McDonald on bringing autism awareness week into the chamber again and on his dedication to raising awareness of this important issue. I also apologise to him and the Minister for Children and Young People because Labour members all thought that the debate was tomorrow so I am supposed to be somewhere else and the second Labour speaker is not here for the same reason.

If members visit the National Autistic Society Scotland's website, they will see as a header the slogan "Accept difference. Not indifference." That principle should also underpin an autism-friendly nation. In fact, we should celebrate difference in this week of events. The theme of this year's event is "Stand out for Autism", which reflects the need to encourage personal pride, self-belief and a sense that we all stand out in our own way. In awareness week 2015, the National Autistic Society wants us to stand out together.

In a similar debate last year, we discussed the importance of ensuring that individuals with autism do not feel cut off from the main stream of everyday activity. As the National Autistic Society points out, autism is a spectrum condition. That means that, although individuals might face some of the same barriers, the condition will affect them in different ways, and many are able to live relatively independent lives.

A former intern in my office, David Nicholson, has gone on to become a supporter of the National Autistic Society, and he is a former youth patron for Ambitious about Autism. Last week, he gave me his thoughts about the need for Scotland to become a truly autism-friendly nation. He said:

"Autistic people have the talent and potential to do very well in society. They want to contribute positively to Scottish life; the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government and others must do all they can to help support those on the spectrum reach their fullest potential.

There is still a long way to go before Scotland is an autism friendly nation. We need to work together to ensure

that people on the spectrum get the chance to show what they can do in the workplace. Too few have that opportunity and too much talent is going to waste which is a tragedy. We also need to ensure that our education system can be as autism friendly as possible too. That means learning from what other countries are doing and making sure that each school is autism friendly via holding autism awareness events for staff and pupils. It is essential that ALL school staff have autism training".

I am sure that, like Mark McDonald, David Nicholson would have welcomed the introduction of autism toolboxes to Scottish schools in 2009 and their continued updating as new resources become available. He is correct in saying that training should be available to all teachers on recognising autism and providing the right support.

Much more could be said about education, but I want to move on to employment, because employment is the theme of autism awareness week this year. I am glad to see that a number of organisations in Scotland have a specific focus in that area. Autism network Scotland has a thriving network of outreach support services across central Scotland. Individuals who receive support have an agreed number of hours of provision per week, which ranges from two hours to 26.

It is estimated that only 15 per cent of autistic adults in the UK are in full-time employment. I am sure that we all agree that that is far too few, especially when we acknowledge how much talent they can bring to a professional environment. Research suggests that people on the autistic spectrum have many exceptional capabilities, some of which are a real necessity in a professional environment—for instance, logical reasoning and a greater attention to detail. The lack of support and opportunity to match their ambitions is striking. Autistic people should be able to live the life that they choose. Central to successful and sustainable employment for autistic people is the ability of employers to harness their unique skills instead of employing them in spite of that disorder.

The motion mentions the autism access awards that are given by the National Autistic Society. It rightly does so, as those awards recognise buildings and facilities that have made an effort to ensure that they can be categorised as autism friendly. They set the standard for accessibility. Of course, making something accessible does not always mean making physical changes. As the society has pointed out, it is as much about changing the approach of staff as it is about changing building layout.

In conclusion, autism awareness week draws our attention to the fact that a huge number of people in Scotland and in the rest of the UK are on the spectrum and that that spectrum means that there are huge differences between individuals. Each autistic person, like anyone who is not on the

spectrum, is unique and has unique aspirations, strengths and needs.

What all those people have in common is that they want and deserve a chance to be treated as equal, with equal rights to the basic daily choices that we enjoy. They are young people with a hunger to learn and flourish in our schools, graduates who are looking for support into the workplace that will give them the chance to contribute that they so desire, and teenagers who are looking to drive for the first time but are in need of extra advice. Each deserves an equal footing from which to take first steps.

Therefore, this week let us not only accept difference but celebrate it, because a diverse employment market demands difference, diversity and a recognition that we all have a positive contribution to make.

I support the motion.

17:22

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I congratulate Mark McDonald on securing this opportunity to highlight world autism awareness week. I say that not simply because it is protocol to do so, but because over the past few weeks, it has come home to me just how far as a society, and how far in providing appropriate support services we have to go until we can really say that we are responding as we ought to to the needs of autistic children and adults. Progress has been made, but a string of recent constituent cases and my attendance at a constituency event last week have very much brought home to me just how far we have to go before we can claim to have created a genuinely autism-friendly environment.

Angus Council is coming to the end of a process that is aimed at ensuring that provision for adults and children with autism in its education service links into the national autism strategy and—just as important—meets the needs of those who require support, be they carers or the cared for. The delay in delivery was caused by the council feeling that a consultation and mapping exercise that was carried out on behalf of the Scottish Government in 2013 had not been as wide reaching as was required to ensure that what was to be delivered fitted what was needed on the ground.

The council wrote to 211 families in the county who were identified as having children with autism to ask them, in the first instance, to complete a questionnaire in order to provide a foundation for creating an autism strategy that would meet the aspirations of those who are at the sharp end.

Subsequent to that parental engagement, events were held in Montrose, Forfar and Carnoustie to present the survey's findings and to

flesh them out. I attended one of those engagement sessions just last week, and what I heard left me concerned that, as things stand and as officials acknowledged in relation to education, the needs of the children are not yet being fully met. However, if Angus Council takes on board the input from parents, as I believe it will, over the short to medium term we will make significant progress.

The consultation identified eight key areas for improvement. Although the process itself was particular to Angus, I am sure that the themes are common to other parts of the country. Those themes are: improving knowledge and understanding of autism and reaching out to the wider community to ensure that it is more clued up on the subject; improving the process of diagnosis and appropriate support immediately post diagnosis; supporting those with autism and their families in accessing locally delivered recreational facilities; improving information sharing among agencies and getting services to talk to each other; planning for transitions right through into adult life, with a particular need for post-school support; improving learning opportunities and, as Mark McDonald suggested, purposeful occupational opportunities for adults; and, finally, supporting adults to live as independently as they can within mainstream tenancies. Within a few months, a strategy that covers the complete educational journey from nursery through to adulthood will be presented to the community planning partnership for its approval, and moves are already afoot to secure parental involvement in overseeing delivery and future policy development.

Of course, the challenge is in how we meet all reasonable needs when those needs, as well as the expectations and views of parents and guardians, can be quite varied. Even if we succeed in creating genuinely autism-friendly education establishments, how do we ensure that the other agencies with whom people with autism come into contact, including the police, the health service and social services, are properly equipped to respond to their needs? Surely the answer lies in the purpose of this week, which is to raise awareness.

How many of us, if we are honest, understand what is needed to create more autism-friendly environments? Two stories that were told by parents at last week's engagement session left their mark on me. One mum revealed that her son could not join in the swimming sessions at his school simply because he could not cope with the whistle-blowing that the physical education teacher used to keep order. Just imagine being excluded from joining classmates in an enjoyable pursuit for the sake of a whistle. Another parent said that her child would be better able to cope in

certain circumstances if the lights in the room were not turned up quite so bright. Imagine being denied the opportunity to be just one of the class for the sake of fitting or using a dimmer switch. How many other minor changes could we, as a society, reasonably make that would move the cause of inclusion forward?

It is to be hoped that, whatever world autism awareness week highlights to us, each of us strives to respond to it.

17:27

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Mark McDonald for lodging the motion. Obviously I am aware of his personal family interest in autism, but I am equally aware of his commitment to the condition in general and to raising awareness of it with the wider public.

Almost a year ago to the day, we celebrated and commemorated the seventh annual world autism awareness day, and now that it is becoming an established date in the calendar, it is right that we continue to highlight its importance. I do not think that it is necessary to go through the various statistics and facts about autism as we have done previously, although it is always worth our while to point out that one in 100 of the UK's population is on the autistic spectrum. In other words, it is a common condition that should not be hidden. In my brief contribution, I will look at some of the very positive initiatives that are helping to make Scotland move towards being the "autism-friendly nation" to which the motion refers.

In last year's debate, we focused on the relaxed cinema and theatre performances that have made such a difference to people, especially children, and which have allowed them to enjoy pursuits that most of us take for granted. I commend His Majesty's theatre in my home city of Aberdeen for staging a relaxed showing of "Horrible Histories" last May. I am sure that we would all like more productions of that nature, which provide sensory-friendly approaches in order to reach out to people with autism.

In another initiative that I heard about recently and which, I think, took place last weekend, Toys "R" Us provided a dedicated day on which children could attend outlets across the UK in a relaxed environment. Fluorescent lighting was reduced, the music was not overly loud and no tannoy announcements were made. Such factors can be very unsettling for children with autism, so I hope that other shops will be similarly progressive in responding to the needs of those children.

I pay tribute to the Scottish Government for the funding that it has provided to the one-stop shop programme, not least the £300,000 that has been dedicated to the advice and information centre in

Queen's Gardens in Aberdeen. That valuable resource provides support for families and individuals in the north-east who are affected by autism, and it seeks to alleviate and to dispel the myths that are often associated with the condition, and the almost embarrassment that is sometimes caused by it. Wendy Minty, the National Autistic Society manager in Aberdeen, has said:

"many people with the condition and their families struggle to access the right support at the right time".

Every region in Scotland is now covered by the one-stop-shop network but, as the National Autistic Society Scotland has pointed out, funding is limited, so local authorities need to start thinking about how they can contribute to those essential services. I was very glad to hear Mark McDonald talk about the work that is being done in Aberdeen to make it an autism-friendly city.

The motion refers to the autism toolbox for schools. As many others do, I think that such resources contribute enormously to our understanding of why children on the autistic spectrum need to be included in mainstream education. The toolbox website provides to parents, staff and young people greater understanding of the everyday challenges that young people with autism face. It is in our schools that basic knowledge of autism needs to be fostered so that children with the condition do not feel ostracised.

Similarly, parents with sons or daughters with autism require support so that they do not feel that their children are different. In her seminal work about her son's right to education, the American writer Debra Ginsberg wrote:

"Through the blur, I wondered if I was alone or if other parents felt the same way I did—that everything involving our children was painful in some way."

Beyond school days, as the motion suggests, with appropriate understanding of the condition many more employers will come to realise—as I have done in my region—the benefits of employing people with autism, particularly those at the higher end of the spectrum, for instance people with Asperger's, who in many locations have proved to be extremely effective and highly conscientious employees. Many office jobs that some of us might find tedious and too repetitive are ideally suited to people with autism, who like the detail and accuracy that are required and take great pride in their work, as well as deriving immense satisfaction from it. There are potential opportunities for people with autism in many professional and other spheres of employment, where their commitment, logical thinking, enthusiasm and attention to detail would be invaluable assets.

We have come a long way in raising awareness of autism but, as Mark McDonald rightly said, that work is on-going, and his unfailing efforts are contributing to that process in no small measure.

17:31

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Like my fellow colleagues, I congratulate Mark McDonald not just on bringing the debate to the chamber but on being a champion and an ambassador for autism and on raising awareness of the condition not just here in Parliament but in his home city of Aberdeen. I, too, welcome the guests who are in the public gallery and those who are live streaming the debate.

Presiding Officer, you were absolutely right to congratulate those who helped the Parliament to achieve accreditation in relation to autism. In particular, I commend Aneela McKenna, who is the Parliament's equalities manager. As someone who is dedicated to looking at all aspects of disability, she is a wonderful asset to the Parliament. We should congratulate all the people who ensured that the Parliament won the wonderful autism access award. As my colleague Mark McDonald said, the Parliament is the first public building in Scotland to win that remarkable award, but it should not be the last.

I believe that the Parliament will serve as the foundation for Scotland to achieve the status of being an autism-friendly nation. The Parliament is showing the way. It should serve as an example for others to follow. People can visit the Parliament with a degree of assurance that they will not encounter the barriers that they often meet.

As Nanette Milne said, even visiting a supermarket or a shop to buy toys can be extremely upsetting for children with autism and can raise their anxiety to a level that many of us cannot understand. I congratulate Toys "R" Us on its initiative, but one day out of 365 is not enough to enable young people with autism to enjoy the experience of choosing a toy or playing in that environment.

There are organisations that support people with autism. In my constituency, the charity SensationALL brings together people with different disabilities, many of whom are on the autism spectrum. It has a sensory area where people can enjoy playing in the knowledge that they are not inhibited by loud noise or bright lights, which can affect them because of their heightened sensory awareness.

I was listening earlier to a wonderful animated film on understanding autism made by Scottish Autism. I had not realised that it was an animation. It describes, in very calm detail, the surroundings in which we all live. One story is about a young

boy playing in the park with his mum. When he decides that it is time to go home, he shows his card with a drawing of a house on it to indicate that he has had enough. That is his best way to show that he wants to go home. There is also a story about a young girl at school who is getting excited about the school dance. Her friend excitedly asks, "What are you wearing?" The young girl, Lisa, responds by describing her school uniform. She took the meaning of "What are you wearing?" too literally. That is her world.

We need to understand the world of people with autism, how we communicate with them and how our environment creates barriers. We should not disable people with autism; rather, we should embrace their needs and find out ways, as we have done in the Parliament, to be inclusive.

We have ambitions for all people with disabilities. As Malcolm Chisholm said, we need to acknowledge that we are all different. That difference is not a failing; rather, we should be proud of it. We should not hide behind being different—that is what makes us who we are. I applaud that difference.

17:37

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On the eve of world autism awareness day I, too, congratulate Mark McDonald on securing the debate. I know that, as a result of a football injury, he is rapidly gaining what I hope is a temporary insight into physical access issues. As other members have said, he has shown a commitment and dedication to the cause not just in the Parliament but outwith it. I applaud him for his efforts.

The National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism work on behalf of those affected by autism. Nanette Milne mentioned some of the figures. However, autism does not affect just the 58,000 or so people in Scotland with the condition. As the National Autistic Society points out, it affects those in their families, who number around 230,000, too.

Autism is a spectrum condition, so although people with autism share three main areas of difficulty, their conditions affect them very differently. Some people can live relatively independent lives; others may need a lifetime of specialist support. Whatever their level of need, all deserve nothing less than to have those needs acknowledged and met.

As Malcolm Chisholm reminded us, autism awareness day's theme is employment. That is indeed fitting. We can all find examples in the communities that we represent across Scotland of employers that are missing out on the abilities and

the skills that people with autism can bring to the workplace.

There is a demonstrable need to address the barriers to employment, which include a shortage of vocational training, inadequate support with job placement and, I am sad to say, all too pervasive discrimination. Exceptions exist but, as Graeme Dey reminded us, a great deal is left to do.

Mark McDonald commented on the problems with diagnosis, and I will spend a bit of time on that subject. According to research for the Scottish strategy for autism, it takes an average of 331 days for a child to go from referral to receiving a diagnosis, although some children wait almost 2,000 days. For adults, the wait is less—it is 162 days, although some adults wait for 500 or so days and those figures do not account for parts of Scotland where no adult diagnostic service is available. However, the count us in campaign report suggests that, even when the diagnosis is made, there are problems. Almost half of those who were diagnosed suggested that the process is highly stressful and a quarter found themselves misdiagnosed.

As Mark McDonald said, many people talk of the relief that they feel once they have been diagnosed. Diagnosis allows people access to support, but I have met people who have been diagnosed who looked simply for diagnosis as an answer. People are not necessarily seeking additional support; they may simply want confirmation from the relevant professionals.

I am aware of the difficulties in getting a referral in Orkney, which have caused huge stress and distress to those who have been affected. I therefore welcome the commitment from NHS Orkney's chief executive to improve patient pathways, although it has to be said that that is thanks largely to the heroic campaigning efforts of Chris Mighall. I hope that that will deliver benefits in the future.

A hope for world autism awareness day is that we will address the fact that there is still a lack of public understanding and awareness of autism, which feeds into fear or experiences of bullying and harassment in communities on all too many occasions. World autism awareness day provides us with an opportunity not only to reflect on the needs of people with autism but to celebrate their contribution and commit ourselves to ensuring that others have the chance to do likewise.

Cinemas and theatres are marking the occasion with special screenings and performances, and businesses—Toys “R” Us has been mentioned—are holding autism-friendly promotions. Simple steps such as reducing lighting, improving signage and making staff autism aware will enable places to become more accessible to those with autism.

With my Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body hat on, I am delighted with the autism access award that has been received by the Scottish Parliament, which is the first public building in Scotland to be given it. I place on record my gratitude to the Parliament's staff for their efforts and commitment.

On that message of hope for world autism awareness day, I congratulate Mark McDonald on securing the debate and commend him for his stalwart efforts on behalf of those in Scotland whose lives are touched by autism.

17:42

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):

I, too, thank Mark McDonald for bringing a debate on a hugely important issue to the chamber. I also congratulate parliament staff on the good work that they have done. I have always been extremely impressed by the staff in this place, and it comes as absolutely no surprise to me that they have taken the issue and grasped it.

I will make a few personal reflections and then comment on some constituency cases that I hope will inform the debate. I have no family experience of autism, but as a piano teacher in what now feels very much like a former existence, I had one pupil who, although he was an extremely bright lad, had some recognisable difficulties in communication and comprehension. He was a wonderful musician who could play by ear, and there were things that there was no way I could teach him because he could do them better than I could. Curiously, however, he struggled—I am now not surprised by this—with some of the inaccuracies of musical notation. People might think that those dots and dashes are a wonderfully precise science, but a lot of it is actually very imprecise. When he struggled, I told him not to worry about playing precisely what was there, but instead just to play it musically.

I have had a few constituency cases to deal with. I make it clear that in the cases to which I refer, there has been no shortage of parental engagement and it is very clear that it was the system, rather than the particular family environment, that was the problem. I will not name anybody, but I will raise three general issues. In one instance, a young man was looking for a fairly secure and protective environment beyond school age, but the difficulty was that there was nothing like that locally. He and his parents were told that he would have to go to the other side of Glasgow. For those of us who start fairly close to Aberdeen, that is quite some distance away, socially. Perhaps it is not a huge number of miles, but it was a very long way for the family. When I contacted the Government about the case, I was told that it was the local authority's responsibility, which I am sure is absolutely right. However, it is

not difficult to see that joining up local authority activity across the country would be sensible, because we will not need many such protected and secure environments across Scotland. Government guidance might be helpful.

I am also coming to the view that there are quite a number of young men who are just coming out of school who struggle to get on—whether to get into a voluntary position or into work. They may well become shut in—that is the term that is used—which means that they essentially retreat to home, often to the bedroom, and are very difficult to get out. The difficulty, as it has been explained to me, is that although the Government provides funding, which is very welcome and is good at getting those young folk from voluntary activity into employment, it appears that the funding is not to be available to get them from “shut-in-ness” into an outgoing voluntary activity. I assume that my information is right to the extent that that is the case. I am merely putting it to the minister that that may be something that the Government would like to look at.

I would also like to pick up on the point that others have mentioned, which is that in many places there does not—to put it more bluntly than some might do—seem to be much prospect of an adult actually being diagnosed. We often have bright folk, including high-achieving graduates, who have social difficulties but who are not going to be diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum. Because they do not tick any of the other social work or welfare boxes, they do not get help that would be useful to them and that might well help them not to develop the mental illnesses that might subsequently bring them into the system. Plainly that situation will not help them, but it will also cost us in the long term. I wonder whether the Government has its eye entirely on the long-term pathways for those who struggle with autism.

That is my brief input. I am sure that the minister knows a lot more about the subject. It would be good to know that we are trying collectively to do the best for those who are on the autistic spectrum, so that we get the best long-term solutions for them. At the end of the day, as with all people with a disability, people with autism are, above all, people and need to be supported as such.

17:48

The Minister for Children and Young People (Fiona McLeod): Like all my colleagues in the chamber, I begin by congratulating Mark McDonald on securing the debate. I also thank the members from across the parties for supporting the motion and the speakers for their reflective contributions.

I point out that Mr McDonald has failed to blow his own trumpet. Just this week, in recognition of the work that he does on the subject, he has been invited to become a member of the National Autistic Society Scotland's advisory board. *[Applause.]* I congratulate him on that and wish him well for all the hard work that I know that that will entail.

We have talked a lot about the autism strategy today. The Scottish strategy for autism is now in its third year. It was launched in 2011 with a £13.4 million fund, 26 recommendations and a 10-year outlook, which it is trying to achieve. I take this opportunity to reinforce the Scottish Government's commitment to improve the lives of people with autism through the strategy and to highlight some of the key activities that have been taken forward under the strategy.

Raising awareness of autism is a key priority of the strategy, because that will help to ensure that people with autism are treated with fairness and respect, as all of us should be. The strategy also includes building capacity and awareness within autism services, so that people receive an integrated service that is responsive to their needs. I think that an integrated service is an answer to many of the constituency problems that some members have raised this evening.

A major piece of work is under way to roll out a new and comprehensive training framework to national health service staff. It has been developed by NHS Education for Scotland with the active participation of people with autism and autism professionals. If we are to understand how to help folk with autism, it is incredibly important that we listen to people with autism when they tell us about the training that our professionals need. The training is interesting: it is responsive and is based on the skills and knowledge that are required at different operational levels in the health professions. It is for all health professionals, from those who occasionally encounter a person with autism, such as the receptionist in a general practitioner's surgery, all the way up to those who provide highly specialised support for people with autism. It is a highly significant piece of work, and I encourage NHS boards to consider how it could be utilised effectively.

Another strategy-funded training opportunity is the free training that has been run through the Open University and the University of Strathclyde over the past three years. That training is not just for those who work with people with autism but for families and folk who are just interested in knowing how to help folk with autism. Over the three years for which the free training has been running, the courses have been oversubscribed every time. That perhaps tells us that a lot of

people out there understand that they need to do something and work with folk with autism.

Dennis Robertson: As the minister was speaking, I was wondering whether there is the same awareness and training at our dental schools. I was thinking that, at a dental practice, there are bright lights and noise and sometimes very tactile invasion. Have people at dental school and dentists been made aware of the particular needs of people with autism?

Fiona McLeod: The training that I referred to, which has been developed by NHS Education for Scotland, is for all NHS staff, and I encourage dental practices to take part in it.

It is important that we work with the autism community to capacity build. I want to mention a local organisation in my constituency, Aspire, which works with and brings together young people with autism. I have been along a couple of times, and it is amazing to see those young people getting the confidence to go out and do more, as a group or as individuals, which is such a hard thing for folk with autism to do.

Nanette Milne mentioned the six one-stop shops that have been funded, at a cost of £1 million, through the strategy. This evening, I can announce a further £653,305 to support the six one-stop shops to continue for another year. *[Applause.]* That is one of the lovely things that you get to do as a minister.

I realise that I am rapidly running out of time, but I want to talk about the autism toolbox, which many members have mentioned. Education is important to everybody and, through the autism toolbox and the accompanying website, we should be able to help to support pupils with autism. I am absolutely convinced that the toolbox approach could lead to significant improvements in autism educational provision. My constituency surgeries, like those of Graeme Dey and Nigel Don, are often taken up with parents who worry about their young children who have autism. I hope that the use of the autism toolbox will ensure that fewer people have to come to me and other members.

I will quickly mention Mark McDonald's campaigning work on relaxed performances, which is absolutely fantastic. It was lovely to hear from Nanette Milne about Toys "R" Us—if anybody should be autism friendly, a shop that sells toys for kids should be. I say to Graeme Dey that I have heard about autism-friendly swimming sessions, which are another step forward. Mr McDonald mentioned the campaign for an autism-friendly Aberdeen, which is wonderful. Scotland is already a fair trade nation, so I hope that we can move towards being an autism-friendly nation, and not just in Aberdeen.

I offer my congratulations and thanks to the staff of the Parliament on its becoming the first public body to receive the autism access award.

Malcolm Chisholm mentioned that only 15 per cent of people with autism are in full-time employment, and it is fitting that the theme of this year's world autism awareness day is employment: the autism advantage.

Increasing employment opportunities for people with autism is another key priority of the strategy. There are a number of strategy-funded projects that are focused on employment, such as project SEARCH, which works in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council and Into Work, and IWORK4ME, which supports self-employed people with autism.

There is so much more that I could have said. I am delighted to see so much positive work going on to improve the lives of people with autism. I welcome in particular the on-going investment in new resources such as the autism toolbox, and I applaud the efforts of all who are concerned with removing barriers to public facilities—including through accessible entertainment—to allow fair and equal access for everyone. I appreciate the efforts of those who are working hard to ensure that all members of society have equal opportunities and feel valued.

It is this Government's aim to lead the way in creating a fairer society that not only encourages active participation in that society but creates opportunities for everyone to contribute to Scotland's economic success, so that we can enjoy the fruits of our work and make Scotland a better place for us all and a place of which we can all feel proud.

Meeting closed at 17:56.

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