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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 8 March 2023

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

Portfolio Question Time

Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. I remind members that there are a couple of groupings—questions 1 and 3, and then questions 2 and 4—so I will take supplementaries on those after both questions in the group have been answered. There is quite a bit of interest in this portfolio and the next, so I make my usual request for questions and responses to be as brief as possible.

Parliamentary Scrutiny (Ministers)

1. **Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will propose scheduling parliamentary time to debate strengthening the scrutiny role of the Parliament in holding the Scottish ministers to account. (S6O-01964)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): The Scottish Parliament is responsible for all matters relating to its functions and internal operation, and it is for the Parliamentary Bureau to recommend the plenary business schedule to the Parliament.

The Government encourages any member wishing to propose reform of current parliamentary procedures to raise such proposals with the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. The Government stands ready, if invited, to discuss any reform proposals. Earlier today, I met Donald Cameron to discuss his proposals for parliamentary reform in what was a very productive meeting.

Sandesh Gulhane: Parliamentary scrutiny is so important in a democracy, because it means that we get to challenge the Government on its failings—and, as we know, there are too many to count with this Scottish National Party Government. We know that the SNP does all that it can to suppress scrutiny, as we have seen from its attempt to prevent the public from viewing its leadership hustings. To disprove that notion, will the minister make a commitment today that his

Government will not take away any Opposition debating time?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, will you move the microphone slightly towards you, please?

George Adam: Yes, no problem, Deputy Presiding Officer.

With the greatest respect, most of what the member has just said is complete and utter nonsense. As I mentioned in my previous answer, I had a very constructive meeting with Donald Cameron regarding his proposals, and I look forward to hearing more proposals from him in the future. Mr Cameron approached that in a very constructive manner. If Dr Gulhane wants to work with the Parliamentary Bureau, I ask him to talk first to his business manager and to take it from there.

Parliamentary Scrutiny (Ministers)

3. **Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will propose time for a parliamentary debate on the effective scrutiny of the Scottish ministers. (S6O-01966)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): As I just confirmed in my answer to Dr Gulhane on the same question, I reiterate this Parliament's responsibility for all matters relating to its functions and internal operation.

Stephen Kerr: I know that the minister is a committed and passionate parliamentarian and that he is as keen as I am to safeguard the reputation of the Scottish Parliament. I also know that he is very familiar with the obligations of the ministerial code. Yesterday, minister Lorna Slater made no serious attempt to answer a question that was asked of her four times. There are other examples of ministers reverting to scripted answers even when those answers bear no relation to the questions that were asked. As the Parliament's man in the Government, will the minister remind his colleagues—as was highlighted by the Presiding Officer yesterday—that there is an obligation born more of respect than anything else to fairly and squarely address the questions that are asked of them in this chamber?

George Adam: On many an occasion, Mr Kerr and I will have had entirely different interpretations of answers and discussions. It is down to the individual as to what they interpret the answer to be. However, I take my role in the Parliament very seriously—as do my colleagues, including Lorna Slater.

Voter Identification Requirements

2. Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any potential impact on turnout at future Scottish Parliament and local authority elections of the introduction by the United Kingdom Government of voter ID requirements for elections to the UK Parliament. (S6O-01965)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): The requirement for voter identification was introduced by the UK Government for reserved elections. Voters at devolved elections in Scotland for the Scottish Parliament and local government do not require voter ID. The Scottish Government remains strongly opposed to it and has concerns about the potential for confusion and disenfranchisement of voters. We will look closely at the operation of voter ID in local government elections in England this May. My officials and several electoral administrators from across Scotland will attend some of the polling places as observers.

Alasdair Allan: Given that the incidents of voter fraud that the measure purports to tackle are extremely rare, as far as anyone can establish, does the minister believe that the measure has been introduced in good faith, or is it simply a way for the Tories to try to cling on to their final remaining seats at the next UK election?

George Adam: Mr Allan has made his point clearly. The introduction of voter ID will make it more difficult for some voters to participate, which is why the Scottish Parliament has rejected going down that route for all elections. Any policy that risks excluding voters should be opposed.

Voter Turnout (Scottish Parliament and Local Government Elections)

4. Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to increase voter turnout in both Scottish parliamentary and local government elections. (S6O-01967)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Turnout at the most recent Scottish Parliament elections, in 2021, was 63.5 per cent, which was an increase of 7.7 per cent from the preceding election. At the local government elections in May 2022, turnout was 44.8 per cent, which was a 2 per cent decrease from 2017. Changes in turnout are the result of a range of factors and, as we have seen in the past, voters turn out in greater numbers when they are engaged. The Government cannot wholly influence that, but our on-going consultation on electoral reform seeks views on how to improve voter registration and how to make voting more accessible.

Bob Doris: Votes must not only be cast in large numbers; they must also count. That is a concern that I have about the Canal ward in my constituency, which had more ballot papers rejected than any other council ward in the 2023 elections, equating to three times the national average. I have raised those concerns constructively with the Electoral Commission. Will the minister meet me to discuss my suggestion that the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to make an impact or to reduce the number of spoiled ballot papers, as well as my other ideas on ensuring that voters' votes are cast and counted rather than being inadvertently spoilt?

George Adam: As always, I am happy to meet Mr Doris to discuss any of his proposals. I reiterate what I said previously to him in the chamber, which is that I agree that we must do whatever we can to ensure that no one loses their vote because they do not understand how to complete a ballot paper. I am pleased to hear that Mr Doris has constructively engaged with the Electoral Commission and others that have a key role to play in supporting and educating voters. I will consider what more can be done on the issue and what measures we can take forward after the electoral reform consultation closes.

Covid Recovery Strategy (Key Services)

5. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how its Covid recovery strategy is supporting the tackling of health inequalities, including in relation to accessing key services such as dentistry. (S6O-01968)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The Scottish Government's Covid recovery strategy is addressing the systemic inequalities that were exacerbated during the pandemic and includes a focus on the wellbeing of children and young people.

Following restrictions on dentistry during the pandemic, we introduced a new enhanced examination from February 2022 that targets oral health inequalities, particularly in children. The latest statistics show that more than 1.6 million national health service examination appointments were completed between April and October 2022, which includes 440,000 child examinations from February 2022. That means that we are on course for more than 3.5 million contacts in the 2022-23 financial year, which is an increase of 40 per cent in NHS dental activity compared with the previous financial year.

Oliver Mundell: I have been inundated by constituents who were not able to see a dentist during the Covid period and have now found that their NHS dentist has gone private. Those dentists

have not left or stopped practising, but they see patients only if they pay. Does the Deputy First Minister recognise the health inequalities that that perpetuates? Will he use his cross-governmental role in co-ordinating the Covid response to see what more can be done in the time that he has left in post?

John Swinney: Mr Mundell has raised an important issue. It is important that people have access to NHS dentistry services. Obviously, in some circumstances, people opt for private dental care. In other circumstances, we have to ensure that that care is provided.

In relation to the points that Mr Mundell has raised about his constituency, I know that NHS Dumfries and Galloway is focusing on improving registration levels through the work of the local dental task force. I understand that, since the new year, up to 4,000 additional NHS registrations have been made available in the board's area. That is an encouraging first step, but I recognise the importance of ensuring that an effective NHS dentistry service is available in all parts of Scotland, including in Dumfries and Galloway.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of members wish to ask supplementary questions, and I want to get them all in, so members should make their questions and answers brief.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Can the Deputy First Minister confirm when the Scottish Government will provide the British Dental Association with the costings that are associated with the revised determination 1, so that formal negotiations on payment reform can commence?

John Swinney: I am afraid that I do not have that information to hand, but I will write to Mr Sweeney about it.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Given that more than 60 per cent of the dental workforce is European, we must face up to the reality of Brexit. Before the European Union referendum, consistently well over 500 dentists who trained in the EU registered in the UK each year. Will the cabinet secretary outline the measures that have been taken to mitigate those challenges, with a view to sustaining our rural dental workforce?

John Swinney: There is a general issue in our society about the availability of skills in the post-Brexit environment. Some of the hard realities of the contraction in the working-age population in Scotland are now presenting themselves. Those things were the substance of worries 20 years ago, but they were alleviated by our participation in the European Union and the free movement of individuals. Today, they are an acute threat to our society, and we must recognise that.

In relation to the specific points that Gillian Martin has raised, we have put in place a number of measures to assist in the recruitment and retention of dental staff, such as fiscal incentives for newly qualified and trainee dentists. Despite the workforce challenges that we face, we remain in a positive position, with the relative strength of 57 dentists per 100,000 of the population providing NHS dental services in Scotland, compared with 43 dentists per 100,000 people in England.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I recently met NHS dentists in north-east Fife who reported that they are having to work through a significant backlog, as well as a significant increase in decay because patients have been waiting for so long. However, the dentists are concerned that they will not be able to deal with that backlog because the cost of treatment is not matched by the fees that they receive from the Government. Will the minister take that up with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, to ensure that the new fee regime reflects the cost of treatment, so that the dentists can deal with the backlog?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please answer as briefly as possible.

John Swinney: The Government reviews all those issues on an on-going basis, and I will look with care at the points that Mr Rennie has made. However, as I have said to the Parliament on countless occasions, we are operating within financial constraints. We are trying to support public services to the greatest possible effect, but there will be challenges in dealing with the recovery from Covid and the significant backlogs that will exist as a consequence of the absence of treatment for so many people for so long.

Covid Recovery Strategy (Third Sector Organisations)

6. **Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its Covid recovery strategy is supporting third sector organisations in rural and island communities, such as Argyll and Bute, to improve health support, including for people with long Covid. (S6O-01969)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The third sector is supported across each local authority area through third sector interfaces, which offer to meet a variety of development needs and which provide a voice into local decision-making structures, including health and social care partnerships and integration joint boards.

Increasingly, third sector interfaces are involved in brokering new services across boundaries and managing funds for local partners. For example, in

Argyll and Bute, more than 200 health and social care related services are being delivered by the third sector, with support from third sector interfaces.

Jenni Minto: During the Covid-19 pandemic, we saw innovative community-led activity to support community resilience. That worked particularly well in Argyll and Bute's rural and island communities, where people have a strong sense of community spirit and social capital. For example, they know their neighbours and who might be vulnerable or at risk. The community planning structures provided a framework for mobilising that support, but much learning can be gained from putting power into local communities. How can the role and power of communities be strengthened for future community resilience?

John Swinney: One of the most important points is that we need to lose none of the ways of working that were prevalent in our communities—particularly rural and island communities—and that were highlighted by Jenni Minto. I think that those services and approaches should be enabled by the work of community planning partnerships.

One of the priorities of the Covid recovery programme board has been to work with the community planning infrastructure around Scotland, which exists in every local authority area, to bring together organisations, and, through the third sector interface, to ensure that the availability of third sector activity to enhance that provision is understood and articulated.

I assure Jenni Minto that that work has a high priority in Government, as we want to ensure that the vital work of community organisations plays a significant role as we take steps to recover from Covid.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a number of supplementary questions. I ask that they be as brief as possible.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I hope that you will indulge me for a second, Deputy Presiding Officer, as I understand that this might be the last Covid recovery question time at which I will be shadowing the Deputy First Minister. I would like to recognise all the effort that he has put into his role as cabinet secretary for Covid recovery over the past number of years, and our mostly cordial exchanges in the chamber and in committee, which, I am sure, will continue when he is on the back benches.

The Covid Recovery Committee has heard from long Covid sufferers, including some from rural and island communities, who have made it clear that their number 1 ask is for the introduction of long Covid clinics in Scotland, to reflect what happens elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In his last few weeks in the role, will the Deputy First

Minister consider whether those can be introduced?

John Swinney: I am grateful to Murdo Fraser for those kind remarks, and I look forward to deploying whatever contribution I can make from the back benches. I look forward to questioning Government ministers on the way in which they carry out their responsibilities and to ensuring, for the benefit of Dr Gulhane and Mr Kerr, that there is proper accountability in Parliament—I will ensure that, single-handedly, from my parliamentary perspective.

I recognise the substance of the issue of long Covid and long Covid clinics that Mr Fraser raises. Those issues are being examined to determine whether the establishment of long Covid clinics is the appropriate way forward. However, what is absolutely essential is that anyone who is experiencing long Covid should, through their interaction with the general practitioner system in Scotland, be able to access healthcare services that will meet their needs. Of course, their needs will vary depending on how long Covid has affected them. However, in all circumstances, they should be able to access the appropriate level of care and support. I assure Mr Fraser that I will use my remaining period in office to ensure that that is the case.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can confirm that Mr Ewing has a seat safely secured for you up at the back, Mr Swinney.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Long Covid Scotland tells us that one in five Covid sufferers have been forced to go private for tests and investigations because there is a lack of access to services on the national health service. We now know that there are 175,000 people living with long Covid—that is three times more than was the case when the Government announced £3 million for specific services for that. Will the Scottish Government increase the funding? That is what is necessary to support those with long Covid.

John Swinney: If you will indulge me for a second, Presiding Officer, I want to make it clear that I will make my own choices about where I sit in this chamber in the foreseeable future. *[Interruption.]* I will certainly sit nowhere near Jackie Baillie, I can tell you that. *[Interruption.]* I am nothing but candid to Parliament—it is all part of my belief in parliamentary scrutiny and accountability, which I have championed all my days.

Jackie Baillie asks me to increase the funding. I wonder whether she was paying attention to the budget, because the budget increased the funding for the NHS by £1 billion, and that would not have happened if I had not taken the tough decision to increase tax—*[Interruption.]*

As always—this is a bit of parliamentary feedback—we again have a running commentary from Jackie Baillie, who speaks throughout the answers that Government ministers are giving carefully—

Jackie Baillie: Nonsense!

John Swinney: She is doing it again as I continue to give my answer, and we will continue with this farrago of nonsense for as long as it takes Jackie Baillie to stop talking while I am answering her question, so I may be here a long time—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you will not, Mr Swinney.

John Swinney: Longer than I anticipated being here, Presiding Officer.

The key point that I make to Jackie Baillie is that the funding for the NHS has been increased, and that can be deployed to meet the needs of individuals in our society, which is what it is intended to do.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I have met several constituents who are living with long Covid, some of them known as first wavers, and they told me that they felt that the support was not there when they needed it. That impacts on family life, too, with breadwinners being unable to work and children coping with the enormous change in their lives as a consequence of having a parent with long Covid. What more can be done to support people living with long Covid and those in their households?

John Swinney: The key point is to ensure that those who are suffering from long Covid obtain the clinical interventions that they require. As I said in answer to Mr Fraser, that will vary from individual to individual. That is why the increase in funding for the national health service is important, because it enables the health service to better meet the needs of individuals and their clinical issues.

In relation to the family context that Beatrice Wishart raised, which is very important, there will be a wide range of services available in the community. I am very familiar with some of the carer support services in Shetland, which I have always admired over the years. They are very good, community-based services that will be available to support families in those circumstances. A mix of clinical and non-clinical interventions will be involved, but, crucially, we must make sure that those focus on the needs of individuals and families, which are right at the heart of the Covid recovery strategy.

Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022

7. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether any post-legislative reviews of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 are being conducted. (S6O-01970)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): They are. The 2022 act includes a range of temporary justice measures, which are due to expire in November this year. Under the terms of the act, ministers must review the operation of each temporary measure before it expires, to inform a decision on whether it should be extended for a further year. In seeking any extension, ministers must lay regulations to amend the expiry date, alongside a statement setting out the findings of the review, allowing full parliamentary scrutiny.

The remainder of the act comprises permanent provisions, and no post-legislative review is currently planned.

Jeremy Balfour: I, too, wish the cabinet secretary all the best as he returns to the back benches.

The Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 gives Scottish ministers the power to release prisoners early, even before they have completed their sentence. That power was used disastrously by the Scottish National Party Government during the pandemic, when it released hundreds of offenders, at least 40 per cent of whom went on to reoffend. Despite that, the SNP Government wants to give itself a permanent power to release prisoners early in the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill. Will the cabinet secretary commit to taking that provision out of the bill until a review has been conducted of whether the power is necessary and while reform of the act takes place?

John Swinney: There will be full parliamentary scrutiny of the provisions that Mr Balfour has referred to, and there will be ample opportunity for that scrutiny to take place so that Parliament can determine those questions. Ministers will, of course, engage on the subject.

Compulsory Sale Orders

8. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to propose the scheduling of time for a ministerial statement on compulsory sale orders. (S6O-01971)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Any proposals for Government business in Parliament are agreed by the Scottish

Cabinet, subject to consideration by the Parliamentary Bureau and, in turn, approval by the Parliament.

Ms Dunbar will have heard the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government speak about compulsory sale orders during January's housing debate. The cabinet secretary highlighted the need for any new powers to be compliant with the European convention on human rights and the careful consideration that that requires.

Jackie Dunbar: When introduced, compulsory sale orders will allow local authorities additional powers to deal with vacant, derelict and abandoned land and buildings, which will allow a greater ability to tackle private absentee landowners. That will mean that the Logie shops in my constituency, which are an eyesore, could be taken over and turned into a useful community asset. Can the minister advise on a timescale for the introduction of CSOs?

George Adam: As the MSP for Paisley, I feel Jackie Dunbar's pain on the issue. As I mentioned, the ECHR implications for compulsory sale orders need careful consideration, and I suggest that Jackie Dunbar contact the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government to talk through the detail.

It might be that compulsory purchase is a suitable vehicle to tackle the issue in the meantime, but I encourage Aberdeen City Council to make contact with officials in the Scottish Government to discuss the matter further.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. We will move on to the next portfolio.

Finance and the Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move on to the next portfolio, which is finance and the economy. I encourage members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Green Jobs (Definition)

1. **Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to define green jobs, including green energy jobs, to help ensure that investment and resources can be targeted to achieve a low-carbon economy. (S6O-01972)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government included a green jobs definition when the green jobs fund was launched in 2021, with the aim of supporting

businesses and their supply chains to help them better transition to a low-carbon economy. The definition has ensured that suitable projects could be identified and that all green jobs created over the life of the projects could be accurately measured.

Maggie Chapman: Skills Development Scotland has highlighted that we talk much about the technical and practical skills that are required for our new economy but we rarely address the lack of meta skills, such as working with people and problem solving. Those skills are in abundance in jobs that should be considered green jobs, such as those in health and social care and in culture. Those are low-carbon jobs, and they will remain the foundation of our new low-carbon economy and society.

Will the minister commit to redefining green jobs across all sectors? Will he also commit to engaging with workers—especially those with fewer opportunities for retraining and reskilling—who already possess the meta skills that are necessary for the success of Scotland's new economy?

Richard Lochhead: Maggie Chapman raises a very important point, and I will certainly reflect on the argument that she makes. As she will be aware, at the moment, there are several definitions of green jobs not just in this country but throughout the United Kingdom, Europe and the rest of the world. Indeed, at the UK level, the Scottish Government has been engaging with the Office for National Statistics, which is reviewing its definition, as the current one is out of date. With the efforts towards net zero and all the new jobs that have been created, it is really important that we have an up-to-date definition of green jobs.

I will certainly take on board Maggie Chapman's points as we move forward with this debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a lot of interest in this question. I will try to get in all the supplementaries, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): The minister is well aware of my just transition report, which outlines the issues that oil and gas workers have in transitioning. Will he provide an update on the Scottish Government's work to take down those barriers to their transitioning to low-carbon jobs?

Richard Lochhead: As Gillian Martin will, no doubt, be aware, we have our just transition planning framework: the draft energy strategy and just transition plan, which is a world first and our first sector-based plan. It is being consulted on until May. I know that Gillian Martin takes a very close interest in that, given her constituency

interest in the offshore industry in the north-east. I urge everyone to submit to that consultation.

We are also working with communities, businesses and workers as we develop further sector-based plans. Drafts will be published before the end of the year, alongside the climate change plan. That will cover areas such as buildings and construction, land use and agriculture, and transport.

A lot of work is taking place to address the concerns that Gillian Martin has expressed.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): An independent report suggests that the Scottish Government's approach to achieving net zero will cut Scottish oil and gas and low-carbon gross value added from £19 billion to £12 billion by 2050 as a direct result of a reduction in jobs, which it is conservatively estimated will decrease from 57,000 to 32,000 by 2030. In addition, the remaining jobs will have a far lower average salary. Rather than gaming definitions to appease the Green coalition partners, does the minister agree that the Government's time would be much better spent revising its threadbare energy strategy?

Richard Lochhead: I spend a great deal of time talking to companies in the offshore and energy sectors in the member's North East Scotland region—perhaps more than he does—and I hear back from them that they see massive job opportunities in the journey towards net zero. Indeed, Robert Gordon University and other institutions have predicted that we could have a net gain in jobs in the north-east if we get it right in the coming decades.

Irrespective of Liam Kerr's party's policies or my party's policies, the north-east province is in decline. Those jobs must be replaced—that is unavoidable. That is why it is so important that we have a just transition and ensure that, over the next 20 years, we have good green jobs for people to move and transition into, so that they can continue to be in employment.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Yesterday, the Finance and Public Administration Committee saw the spring budget review cut £68.5 million from the net zero budget due, apparently, to a lack of demand. Although the number of completions is down, the number of surveys is up by 28 per cent from last year. Does that not suggest that, rather than there being a lack of demand, there is a lack of ability to deliver on the demand, which is throttling back delivery against those vital funds to deliver net zero in Scotland's buildings and homes?

Richard Lochhead: Patrick Harvie, who is the responsible minister, is putting together a very ambitious plan for decarbonising buildings and

homes in Scotland that has the potential to create thousands of new jobs across all our communities.

However, I should highlight the recently published research by Skills Development Scotland, which worked with the University of Warwick and the University of Strathclyde, that says that we now have up to 100,000 new green jobs in Scotland. Other reports say that Scotland is ahead of the rest of the UK on progress in the creation of green jobs.

I think that we are in a good place. There is a lot of work to be done, but there is evidence that we are creating good green jobs in this country.

Windsor Framework

2. **Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its initial assessment is of any potential impacts that the Windsor framework may have on Scotland's economy. (S6O-01973)

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): The Scottish Government welcomes the framework in terms of its importance to wider relations in Northern Ireland and between the European Union and the United Kingdom. Some businesses that trade with Northern Ireland might face fewer barriers to trade, which could, for example, provide welcome relief to Scotland's world-renowned seed potato industry, which has been harmed so badly by Brexit.

However, the framework does not resolve burdensome Brexit barriers for Scotland, while Northern Ireland will still, of course, benefit from being part of the single market. Scotland must get the right to choose our own future—one that takes us back into the EU, with all the benefits that that will generate.

Fiona Hyslop: For many years, many of us have supported the specific needs of Northern Ireland, recognised how precious peace is and recognised the need to restore a functioning democratic Assembly at Stormont. We welcome the breakthrough on the issue, which is needed to remedy a problem of the UK Government's own making. However, does the minister agree that it would be blinkered not to understand that it will have a knock-on impact on Scotland's economy? Although many of us are of the view that full access to the single market for trade is an unbelievably special position—a "prize", as the Prime Minister puts it—are there any short-term measures that the Scottish Government can take to protect Scottish small and medium-sized enterprises from the competitive advantage that Northern Ireland now has?

Ivan McKee: The Windsor framework clearly represents a welcome improvement in conditions

for the Northern Irish economy, which will now have lower barriers to trade with businesses in Britain. That could benefit the many Scottish businesses that trade with Northern Ireland. However, we should not forget that Northern Irish firms will continue to have a competitive advantage over Scottish firms in trading with the EU because of their access to the large and lucrative single market from which Scotland was forcibly removed.

That is just another of the many consequences of Brexit, the only solution to which is Scotland rejoining the EU as an independent nation. The Scottish Government continues to provide support to our businesses and is focused on delivering our 10-year export growth strategy in “A Trading Nation—a plan for growing Scotland’s exports”, which remains firmly focused on the recovery and growth of Scotland’s exports through values-based trade. Our trading relationships with the EU remain central, both now and in Scotland’s future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Liz Smith has a supplementary question.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer. I indulge your patience again and the minister’s patience, as this is the first formal occasion in the chamber since John Swinney intimated his intention to step down as Deputy First Minister that I have had the opportunity to wish him well in the future. I have certainly enjoyed our feisty exchanges in the chamber, whether on education or finance, over a very long period of time, even if we have seldom agreed on anything.

In relation to the Windsor agreement, does the minister at least acknowledge that one of its benefits is a much-improved working relationship between the UK Government and the EU, which his colleague Mr Swinney has often called for?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be as brief as possible, minister.

Ivan McKee: I agree that that is the case, and I think that I made it clear in my answer that we welcome the agreement. It remains the case that there are still restrictions—although fewer—on trade with Northern Ireland. Of course, as the Prime Minister said, it puts Northern Ireland in a very advantageous position in having a foot in both the UK market and the EU market. We believe that that position puts Scotland at a competitive disadvantage and that it is one that Scotland should be able to realise as well.

National Planning Framework 4

3. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the implementation of the

fourth national planning framework since its adoption on 13 February 2023. (S6O-01974)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): I was delighted to adopt NPF4 on 13 February. It is now part of the development plan, and it will be influential in all planning decisions. In just a short time, good progress is already being made on key actions from the delivery programme, and I have published a letter outlining transitional arrangements to support early implementation.

I will shortly lay regulations in the Parliament setting out the arrangements for new-style local development plans and therefore complete the reforms of the development planning system. NatureScot has recently published guidance to support application of NPF4 policy on biodiversity. Further guidance, including on 20-minute neighbourhoods and short-term lets, is in preparation.

Kaukab Stewart: NPF4 could be the key to making Scotland’s places more sustainable, liveable and productive, and it is, indeed, heartwarming to see progress on the effective delivery of the new policies. As councils begin to review their local development plans to align with NPF4, can the minister outline how the new planning system will accelerate Scotland’s wellbeing economy?

Tom Arthur: Our national spatial strategy will support the planning and delivery of productive places where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. We will actively encourage investment where it is needed most, by rebalancing development and by playing to the economic strengths and opportunities of each part of Scotland. NPF4 encourages councils, in the preparation of local development plans, to allocate a broad range of sites for business and industry, taking into account local economic strategies and priorities.

That also supports the broader objectives of delivering a low-carbon and net zero economic recovery, and supporting community wealth in Scotland’s wellbeing economy. I will shortly lay regulations in the Parliament that will set the arrangements for preparation of a new generation of place-focused local development plans, which we will support with guidance on how councils can deliver on the ambitions in NPF4 through their own plans.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Will planning advice note 1/2011, which is on noise, and the associated technical advice note be updated as part of the fourth national planning framework? If so, will the update take into consideration the World Health Organization’s noise recommendations?

Tom Arthur: As substantial changes have been made through the reform of our planning system, including a new policy framework in NPF4, I recognise that there will now be some discrepancies in existing planning guidance and advice. Aspects of existing guidance will still be useful for reference through the new planning system and policy approach and, over time, we will review the historical advice as appropriate.

Private Finance Initiatives and Public-Private Partnerships (Cost)

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the cost to the public purse will be of private finance initiatives and public-private partnerships in 2023-24, and how this compares to 2022-23. (S6O-01975)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The latest published data shows that the total estimated payment costs of private finance initiative and public-private partnership contracts is £1.46 billion in 2023-24, and £1.41 billion in the year before that. That is an increase of around £50 million.

When it is broken down, we see a cost increase in PFI contracts of £47.6 million, a cost increase in non-profit-distributing contracts from prior to 2010 of £1 million and a cost increase in NPD/hub programme contracts of £1.8 million. The majority of PFI payments are index linked and they rise by inflation each year, but most NPD/hub payments are not, making them less sensitive to inflation.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that reply. Although he is standing down from Government, I hope that he will, indeed, soon return.

Does he share my concerns that the 75 remaining PFI and PPP schemes will now cost an additional £770 million to the termination of the contracts, all to be borne by the taxpayer? What does that say about the financial recklessness and short-sightedness of Labour and the Lib Dems, who bequeathed those schemes to the people of Scotland 16 years ago? Taxpayers will continue to pay for them for many years to come.

John Swinney: I sympathise entirely and agree with Mr Gibson's point of view. As he will know, the Government brought the PFI scheme to an end because it simply did not deliver value for money, and we introduced more affordable schemes. As well as stopping the excessive profits, NPD/hub payments are largely not indexed linked. That is a crucial point that is at the heart of Mr Gibson's question.

The folly of linking the PFI schemes to inflation, which benefited those providing the finance, has

resulted, in an inflationary climate, in excess profits being made. That was baked into the contracts by the Labour and Liberal ministers who approved them. They are fiscal folly, and I am glad that we have taken the measures that we have taken to reduce the drain on the public purse if they had carried on. However, we are, of course, paying for the legacy of those mistakes.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish National Party likes to point the finger at wasted expenditure from decades ago, but its own track record on that front is not exactly glowing. What lies behind my question is the relative inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the Scottish Government's ability to deliver projects. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that financial assessments are carried out to provide best value for the public purse?

John Swinney: I have absolutely no idea what that question was about. When I was up in Aberdeen this morning, I saw the junction for the Aberdeen western peripheral route, which we delivered—I see Mr Burnett sitting right beside Mr Stewart—but, instead of going on that route, I went to Robert Gordon University, which has a beautiful building. When I came back down the road, I went over the Queensferry crossing. Where on earth did the Queensferry crossing come from? It was delivered on time and on budget by this Government, and Mr Stewart should thank us for that.

Inverclyde Council (Financial Support)

5. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what financial support, in addition to the local government settlement, will be allocated to Inverclyde Council in 2023-24, and how this compares to 2022-23. (S6O-01976)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): At this stage, I can confirm that Inverclyde Council will receive from the settlement £201.9 million to fund vital day-to-day services, which is an extra £5.3 million, or 2.7 per cent, compared with 2022-23. In addition, it will receive its fair share of the undistributed sum of £329.8 million, which includes the extra £223 million that was announced at stage 3 of the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill.

All councils, including Inverclyde Council, will receive additional in-year funding from individual portfolios over and above the local government settlement, but it is too early to say how much that will be or how it will compare with the current year.

Stuart McMillan: The Deputy First Minister will be well aware of the economic and social challenges that Inverclyde faces. With the bid to

make the Clyde green freeport one of the two freeports in Scotland narrowly missing out, what additional support will the Scottish Government provide to allow the district to attract investment? Will the Government consider a detailed business case from Inverclyde Council to help to address the 40-plus years of managed economic and social decline that my constituency has suffered?

John Swinney: I understand the disappointment in the Inverclyde area about the unsuccessful bid in the green freeport process, but I assure Mr McMillan that a rigorous and dispassionate process was undertaken by Scottish and United Kingdom Government ministers and officials.

A range of measures have been taken to support the Inverclyde economy. The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise continues to engage with the Inverclyde socioeconomic task force, and the city region deal for Glasgow and the surrounding area delivers substantial investment in the Inverclyde area. Investment will be taken forward through the Clyde mission, which will have an effect on the Inverclyde area, into the bargain.

The Government will, of course, consider any further measures that are suggested by Inverclyde Council as we work to improve and strengthen the Inverclyde economy in the foreseeable future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are three more questions in the *Business Bulletin*. I want to get through them all, but questions and responses will need to be slightly briefer and I will not be able to take any supplementary questions.

Private Finance Initiatives and Public-Private Partnerships (Council Budgets)

6. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any cost pressure on council budgets relating to private finance initiative and public-private partnership contracts. (S6O-01977)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The Government recognises the challenging financial circumstances that local authorities and, indeed, the entire public sector currently face. Those challenges were considered and reflected in the Scottish budget decisions, which will provide local authorities with nearly £13.5 billion in 2023-24, including more than £793 million of additional revenue funding. The Scottish Futures Trust continues to work with public authorities in Scotland to assist them in making savings and improving performance across PFI and PPP contracts.

Marie McNair: Figures that were provided to me by West Dunbartonshire Council show that, in relation to such contracts, that council alone will need to pay £15.9 million a year for many years to come. By the end of the contracts, the cost is estimated to be £437 million—going on double the council's total revenue budget for education, social work and other services.

Does the Deputy First Minister agree that those funding mechanisms, which were imposed by new Labour, continue to be financially debilitating for councils and to drain resources that could be spent elsewhere?

John Swinney: Marie McNair makes a fair point. The financial burden of such contracts is a millstone around the necks of a number of local authorities in Scotland. The contracts were far too expensive. They have far too many costs over a longer period and those are now having a real effect in eroding the budgets of local authorities.

Non-domestic Rates (Revaluation)

7. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government by how much local authority non-domestic rates bills will increase, following revaluation of public sector properties based on rebuild costs using the 1 April 2022 tone date. (S6O-01978)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): All properties will be revalued on 1 April 2023, including those in the public sector. Revaluations redistribute the tax base to reflect changes in market circumstances and ensure fairness for all ratepayers.

Many public sector properties are revalued using the contractor's method, taking into account rebuild costs, which will have increased since the tone date for the previous revaluation took effect. A revaluation summary report, which will include information broken down by property class, is expected to be published in 2023-24 once final values for the revaluation have been made available.

Mark Griffin: The contractor's method for determining rateable values using the real costs of recent new buildings is now passing artificially high values on to councils, which now face spiralling non-domestic rates bills. In South Lanarkshire, the bill has gone up by £2.9 million. Why is the Government using that method and passing on increased bills to local authorities at an extremely difficult time for them?

Tom Arthur: As the member will be aware, ascertaining RVs for non-domestic properties is a matter for Scottish assessors, who act independently in accordance with the legislation. The funding that has been provided to local

government this year totals £13.5 billion, which is more than £700 million above what was indicated in the resource spending review.

North-east Scotland (Budget 2023-24)

8. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how the Scottish budget 2023-24 will support the economic development and prosperity of the north-east. (S6O-01979)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government is fully committed to supporting the economic development of the north-east. The budget will reflect a continued investment to ensure a just transition to net zero that supports business growth and creates job opportunities. That includes the £500 million just transition fund, £379 million of investment in the Aberdeen city region deal and side package, £180 million for the emerging technologies fund, £100 million for the green jobs fund and £75 million for the energy transition fund. I could go on.

Alexander Burnett: The Scottish National Party might claim that it is delivering for communities in the north-east, but its policies undermine Scottish business. I refer to policies such as the deposit return scheme, which will bring economic ruin to firms across Scotland. One small business in my constituency, Esson's of Huntly, faces costs of £20,000 to implement the DRS. Why should businesses in the north-east trust the SNP Government when, time and again, it proceeds with damaging or incompetent policies?

Richard Lochhead: I have just outlined to the member the unprecedented package of support for north-east Scotland that is being provided by the Scottish Government. On the other issues that he mentions, ministers will, of course, continue to listen to business.

I suggest to him that he speaks to his United Kingdom Government, which is holding back the Acorn carbon capture project. That would create thousands of jobs in his constituency in north-east Scotland. Indeed, his Government should match the just transition fund provided by the Scottish Government to the north-east of Scotland. Given that it has taken more than £300 billion out of the North Sea, perhaps it can give some of that back to invest in the north-east and Scotland's future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio question time. There will be a brief pause to allow the front benches to change before we move on to the next item of business.

International Women's Day 2023

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08137, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on international women's day 2023, #EmbraceEquity. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons. I call the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, to speak to and move the motion. You have around 13 minutes, First Minister.

14:50

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Thank you, Presiding Officer, and happy international women's day to everyone here.

International women's day is a moment of celebration, but it is also a moment of reflection. We rejoice in the achievements of women and women's organisations here in Scotland and across the world. We mark progress towards gender equality, but, on this day, we also remind ourselves of how much more still needs to be done.

Of course, this is the last international women's day that I will mark as First Minister. I recall speaking in this chamber on the day that I became First Minister, with my eight-year-old niece looking on from the public gallery. I said then that I hoped that my election, as the first woman to hold the office of First Minister, would help to open the door to greater opportunity for all women and that it would also help leaders to reach a point when girls no longer even question the fact that a woman can hold the highest political office in the land. We have a way still to go to achieve true gender equality, but we have also come a long way in these past eight years.

One of my first acts as First Minister was to appoint a Cabinet that was gender balanced. I got lots of emails in the days after that asking how I knew that all the women in my Cabinet were there on merit. I was struck by the fact that I did not get a single email asking me how I knew that all the men in my Cabinet were there on merit. [Applause.]

At the time, the Scottish Cabinet was one of just three gender-balanced Cabinets in the world. There are many more now. I take this opportunity to say that I hope that future First Ministers will continue that practice. Unless we believe that women are somehow less qualified than men, it stands to reason that any Cabinet that is not gender balanced is not properly reflective of all the talents at our country's disposal.

Alongside many others, I have campaigned throughout my life for equal representation more

generally—not least here, in our national Parliament. We are not quite there yet, but we are closer than ever. As of now, 46 per cent of us elected to this chamber are women. In addition, and perhaps partly because of that greater representation, this Parliament has taken important steps to protect, promote and improve women's rights.

We were the first Parliament in the world to legislate for provision of free period products. We have ensured gender equality on public sector boards and we have passed vital legislation to give better and stronger protection to victims of domestic abuse. We will soon consider further measures to safeguard the right of women to access abortion services—in other words, to access healthcare—free from harassment and intimidation.

Before I leave office, I will say more about forced adoptions, and I hope that we will, in the interests of building a better future, continue to address and help to heal the past injustices that women have suffered.

We have also made childcare and support for families integral to our economic and social policies with policies including the baby box, the expansion of childcare, extra support for carers and the Scottish child payment—the policy of which I am perhaps most proud. Clearly, those policies do not benefit only women, but they benefit women disproportionately. They are achievements that our Parliament as a whole can be proud of—achievements to which all parties across the chamber have contributed.

Some of our policies to support families are made necessary by United Kingdom Government policies that do not have the interests of women at their heart. For example, we are ensuring that no one loses out financially as a result of the two-child benefits cap and the abhorrent rape clause that is part of it.

Too often, there are steps, including improvement of parental leave or addressing the injustice that is being suffered by WASPI women—women against state pension inequality—that we cannot take because we, in this Parliament, do not yet have the powers to do so. Indeed, the power to improve the rights and the lives of women, and to promote equality more generally, are among the many reasons why I support Scotland—and this Parliament—becoming independent.

That said, I truly believe that the record of the Parliament is one to be proud of—but we must build on it in the years to come. That is why my focus today is on the future rather than on the past. In particular, I will highlight two policy areas—enterprise and criminal justice—in which

we now, I believe, have an opportunity, indeed a responsibility, to make more progress.

Two weeks ago, I visited the Roslin Institute with Ana Stewart, the entrepreneur and investor who is the author of a landmark report on women in enterprise. That report lays bare the reality that although women make up more than half of our population, only one in five businesses in Scotland right now is founded by and led by women. That inequality is unjustifiable—first and foremost from the perspective of fairness and equal opportunity. As the review says, the current position represents a

“denial of opportunity on, literally, an industrial scale.”

That inequality is also economically counterproductive. If women are supported to set up businesses at the same rate—or anything like it—as men already do, the benefits to our economy will be immense. The report therefore calls for better integration of entrepreneurial education across our system. It recommends that Scotland should create new sources of support for women-led businesses at the start-up stage, and again at the point at which they seek private funding. It makes the case for establishing Scotland as a leader in femtech, which is technology that is designed to address women's health issues. It is an area that is of enormous economic and scientific potential that represents a particular opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

The report recommends that business support and incubation services should be available closer to nurseries, schools, supermarkets and general practitioner surgeries, so that primary carers—who are more likely to be women—find them easier to use. Those are powerful recommendations, and I look forward to seeing their implementation.

One of the interesting and important truths underpinning the recommendations is that the gender gap—whether it is in enterprise or elsewhere—is a consequence as well as a cause of the deep-rooted and often systemic sexism and inequality that still exist across our society. That is why the review report places a strong emphasis on education.

It is also why—perhaps unexpectedly in a report about enterprise—the report supports the creation of new criminal offences to tackle misogyny, which continues to constrain the ability of too many women to contribute fully to the economy, politics and wider society, and, sometimes, even just to live our lives without fear. That is something that is particularly true in the toxic online culture that we unfortunately live in, which too often spills over into our daily lives.

That brings me to the second issue that I want to touch on. A year ago today, on international women's day, Baroness Helena Kennedy's report,

which had been commissioned by the Scottish Government, was published. It recommended new criminal offences for misogyny. Today, we have published a consultation paper on draft legislation to implement the recommendations of that report. The reforms will entail five new laws to give police and prosecutors new powers to tackle the pernicious impact of misogyny. I strongly encourage everyone with an interest to read and respond to the consultation.

That draft legislation is just one of a series of forthcoming changes that are designed to make the criminal justice system work more effectively for women and, by helping to free women from the scourge of misogyny, ensure that more of us can reach our full potential.

In recent years, the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 and action to improve access to forensic medical examination have made a difference. However, despite real progress, there is still too much evidence that the criminal justice system is failing too many victims of sexual crime—most of whom are women.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the First Minister consider supporting my colleague Pam Gosal's bill that would create a domestic abuse register?

The First Minister: I think that I said previously to Pam Gosal in the chamber that we will consider the proposal sympathetically when we see more detail. I give that commitment again today.

It is the case that most victims of sexual crime are women. In 2020-21, the overall conviction rate for all crimes and offences in Scotland was 91 per cent. For rape and attempted rape, the figure was just 51 per cent. We also know that only a minority of rapes are reported to the police in the first place. Obviously, it would not be appropriate for any Government to seek a blanket increase in the conviction rate: conviction is a matter for independent courts. However, we have a duty to address systemic barriers to justice and the many challenges that women face at each stage of a criminal justice process that was designed by—and, to a very significant extent, for—men.

In last year's programme for government, we committed to introducing a new criminal justice reform bill before this summer. That bill, which I am pleased to say is on track for introduction before the summer, will propose far-reaching reforms to the criminal justice system. Among other proposals, it will address the "not proven" verdict, consider how rape trials should be conducted and seek to implement key recommendations from Lady Dorrian's review of management of sexual offences. I will not be in the Government when Parliament considers that bill,

but I will be a strong advocate for it from the back benches.

Obviously, I cannot go into detail on that bill's provisions today, but I want to highlight one important aspect of it, which is linked to an announcement that I was pleased to make this morning at the University of Glasgow. One especially intrusive aspect of criminal procedure arises when requests are made to lead evidence about a victim's sexual history or so-called bad character. As a result, Lady Dorrian highlighted in her review the importance of victims having access to automatic independent legal representation in those circumstances. The Scottish Government is supportive of that, so I can confirm that the forthcoming bill will propose that women have access to free independent legal representation in those circumstances.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I wholeheartedly welcome that. Labour supports that proposal, and we welcome the Government's bringing it forward.

The First Minister: I thank Pauline McNeill for that support. As she will know, there have been calls for the right to independent representation to go further; indeed, some people argue that it should be granted to victims of sexual crime at all stages of the criminal justice process. A move of that nature would require significant change and would need to be considered very carefully.

However, I want to make it clear that the Scottish Government is sympathetic to the basic principle that victims should have better access to legal support. That is why, today, we have announced that we will provide support for a new dedicated law clinic based at the University of Glasgow. I visited the university's law school this morning—such visits are always a very happy trip down memory lane for me—to hear more about the clinic, which will be the first of its kind in Scotland and will offer services to victims of sexual offences from across Scotland.

As well as offering advice and representation, the clinic will teach students and do research. Perhaps most poignantly of all, given that it is international women's day, it will be named the Emma Ritch law clinic, after the late and much-missed head of Engender. *[Applause.]* Emma was a Glasgow university alumna and is fondly remembered by all of us as a titan of the feminist movement in Scotland. The clinic will be a fitting tribute to her and to her formidable legacy as a fearless advocate for women's rights. I hope that the clinic will make an important and transformative difference to women's and girls' experience of the criminal justice system in years to come.

When I spoke in the chamber on Saturday to mark the 20th anniversary of the brilliant Scottish Women's Convention, I referred to gender equality as "an unwon cause". As all of us know, and as evidence that I have cited in this speech shows, we have a huge amount still to do in order to fully win gender equality. It can be easy to become frustrated by, and perhaps angry at, the slow pace of change, but we have a lot to be proud of. When I look back across my career, examples of progress are not hard to find. The world today is a different and, in many ways, better place than it was when I was starting out in politics.

However, I am sorry to say that, in other ways, the world is also a harsher and more hostile place for girls and young women. Abuse, harassment, sexual threats and violence are not new phenomena but, sadly, the modern world offers more opportunities for such behaviour to reach and to harm women. We must tackle that—not just for women's sake, but for the sake of society as a whole, which needs to harness the talents of our whole population in order to thrive and to prosper.

Let me end on a more positive note. For all the challenges that we still face, we can take pride in—and, I hope, inspiration from—the very real achievements of this Government and Parliament over recent years, whether that achievement is in our social policies, our promotion of equality in the workplace or our improvement of the criminal justice system. In all those areas and others, our Parliament has made real progress for women.

I remain optimistic that we can continue that progress in the months and years ahead, and that we can do so inclusively and with common cause. As we do so, I will be in a new seat, a bit further back in this chamber. No matter how hard it can sometimes feel in these times, I will always be the strongest possible advocate for women's rights, as this Parliament seeks to win the cause of true equality for the next generation of women.

On international women's day, I am proud to move, in my name,

That the Parliament welcomes the 2023 International Women's Day theme of #EmbraceEquity, which recognises that each person has different circumstances, and that there is a need to focus resource and opportunity where it is most needed to reach an equal outcome; recognises that it is the responsibility of everyone to end the discrimination that women and girls face; acknowledges that, while much progress towards achieving equity has been made, there is more to do in Scotland and around the world to achieve and maintain equity; welcomes the independent Stewart review into increasing women's participation in entrepreneurship; recognises and takes up the challenges given by the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls to address systemic inequality; further recognises that cultural shifts are needed alongside legislation; recognises the tireless work of organisations and communities across Scotland to promote equity and support all women, and agrees that equity is necessary for society and the

economy to thrive, and that everyone should work together to embrace equity on, and beyond, International Women's Day.

[Applause.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Meghan Gallacher to speak to and move amendment S6M-08137.2.

15:05

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Last weekend, I joined the First Minister and MSP colleagues as we gathered in the chamber to celebrate international women's day. The event was organised by the Scottish Women's Convention, and I put on record my thanks for such an enjoyable afternoon. A personal highlight of the day were the contributions from Grace and Zara from Our Lady's high school in Cumbernauld. The quality of their speeches was outstanding. Grace and Zara are an asset to their school and fantastic role models for other young women. It made me proud, as a Central Scotland MSP, to see the next generation of talent afforded the opportunity to speak in this chamber. I hope that we will see them elected, perhaps to the Scottish Parliament or another chamber, in the future.

I will start my speech by talking about opportunity. After all, the theme of this year's international women's day is embrace equity. However, it is crucial that we recognise that we are still living in an unequal country. Despite it being more than 100 years since women first received the vote, we still earn 11 per cent less on average than our male colleagues, run just 4 per cent of Scotland's top businesses, fill just 13 per cent of senior Police Scotland posts and represent just 6 per cent of Scottish newspaper editors. Our journey towards achieving equality is far from over.

Even with all the progress that has been made by generations of feminists, gender still plays an important role in how we are seen and in the life opportunities that we enjoy in Scotland today. We cannot, in any debate about equality, ignore the inequalities that persist in our society for more than half of the population. It is vital that we continue to strive towards ending those inequalities. As a Parliament, we must be ambitious when looking at the progression of women's rights and, of course, protecting those rights that have been hard won over the years. We cannot afford to go backwards, and we must continue to ensure that the voices of women are heard and not vilified.

Members on my side of the chamber agree with the premise of the Scottish Government motion, and I associate myself with the First Minister and her calls to end the discrimination, harassment

and abuse that women and girls face in our country and around the world.

I will start by looking at some statistics for Scotland. Sexual crimes are at their highest level on record. Domestic abuse incidents are at their second-worst level on record: in 2021-22, there were more than 32,000 charges of domestic abuse in cases that were reported to the Crown Office. Threatening and abusive behaviour offences were recorded as the most common types of offence related to domestic abuse. Only yesterday, we heard of the intimidation and harassment that women receive on public transport. That is not the Scotland that I want my daughter or any young girl to grow up in, and I hope that we can all agree that we can and must do better.

The issue of abuse and discrimination is not isolated to one country. Sadly, it is an all-too-common theme around the world. One newspaper story that I hoped that I would never read was about Mahsa Amini, who was beaten to death by Iranian authorities for not wearing a hijab properly. The Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran claimed that she had a heart attack at a police station, collapsed and fell into a coma before being transferred to a hospital, but eyewitnesses allege that she was severely beaten and died as a result of police brutality. The case shed renewed light on the country's treatment of women, with a growing number of female Iranians choosing to flout the law to wear the hijab. I applaud the brave women who have stood up against their oppressors, but I worry about the severe consequences that many will face for doing so.

At times like these, we need to be thankful that, throughout our United Kingdom, we have the right to freedom of speech and expression. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have banned women from attending university, leaving future generations of women unable to choose their futures. In Ukraine, the on-going conflict has severely impacted women and girls. From the bombing of maternity hospitals to human trafficking and gender-based violence, the horrors of war are a daily reality for Ukrainian women.

The violation of women's rights must stop. We must stand together, always, against those who seek to remove basic human rights from women. I lodged the Scottish Conservatives amendment to highlight the violation of women's rights globally, and I hope that the Government and Opposition parties will support it at decision time.

I hope that, one day, we will be able to use international women's day as a cause for celebration because we have achieved equity, rather than a reason to talk about progress and the mountains that we still need to climb.

I want to finish on a positive note, as we are celebrating women today. We have achieved many things together, from the roll-out of free period products across the country to support for the introduction of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. We support women best when we work together across political divides and Parliaments. If we are serious about embracing equity, we must continue to do that.

I will finish with this quotation:

"there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it."

I move amendment S6M-08137.2, to insert, after "maintain equality":

“; expresses disappointment in the backsliding of women's rights across the world in the past year, and particularly in Iran and Afghanistan”.

[Applause.]

15:11

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Speaking on international women's day is one of my favourite moments in the parliamentary year. It is an opportunity to celebrate women and the contribution that they make, to be proud of the progress that we have made on women's equality and to be hopeful about the changes that are still to come.

There is much to celebrate. Scotland is rich with talented, inspirational and fantastic women. Just this morning, Glasgow's own Jamie Genevieve was added to the Forbes 30 under 30 list, following the global success of her Vieve make-up brand. Last week, runner Eilish McColgan broke the 10,000m record, beating Paula Radcliffe's time.

Young girls across the country are looking on as Scotland's women tear down barriers, reach new heights and give us reason to celebrate every day.

Today is an opportunity to be proud of not just the women who are making the headlines but those whose achievements often go unnoticed—women who are unpaid carers, women who keep the family wheels turning and women in the NHS and social care, who give their all, every day, no matter how hard things get.

Last night, I was grateful to have the opportunity to hear from unpaid carers at an event for the A Scotland that cares campaign. The women from whom we heard shared their experiences of giving up careers, making sacrifices in education and going without, so that they could properly look after someone who they loved when help from the state just was not there.

Some of the women's contributions were harrowing, but they gave us reason to hope. We do not need miracles if we are to improve those women's lives; we just need to listen to what they tell us they need. They need respite, so that they can take time for themselves. They need less bureaucracy, so that they are not overburdened with unnecessary administration. They need an end to unfair rules on carers benefits, such as the full-time-study rule, so that they can participate fully in education and work without fear of losing support.

I take this opportunity to thank all those women for all that they do and for being so candid with us. It is only by listening to people's lived experience that we can deliver the transformative change that so many women need.

I reiterate my commitment and that of my party to fight for that change. Our Labour movement has a long history of supporting women's rights and pushing forward the march towards equality. Labour Governments brought about the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Equality Act 2010. In Scotland, it was Labour's Monica Lennon who helped to change the law on period poverty. We have always embraced equality, not just in our words but in our deeds. Together, we have come far, but the progress cannot and will not stop here. We will continue to embrace equality.

I am pleased to see the First Minister here to lead what might be one of her final debates as First Minister. We might have political differences—there might be many—but I know that she is in the chamber because she cares passionately about women's equality. As Scotland's first female First Minister, she has been an inspiration to many young women and girls across the country.

I have spoken many times about the importance of representation and the need for people to see someone just like them in a room if they are to know that they can be there, too. The First Minister was that woman in the room for many of the young women who are entering politics today. I take this opportunity to thank her personally for helping me and my husband when she was our MSP a number of years ago. She helped us to access the care and support that we needed, without which I would not be here today, so I want to say thank you. *[Applause.]*

Presiding Officer, I sincerely hope that, whoever the next First Minister is, they will protect and progress women's equality. That will mean supporting women at every turn, embedding gender analysis into our policy-making and spending decisions, and making the changes that women tell us they need because, in the words of Cher,

"Women are the real architects of society."

Some of this means bold but necessary structural change, but we are not talking just about big-ticket or expensive items. This is also about the smaller and societal changes that are needed to tear down the barriers that women still face and that are still restricting their ability to reach their full potential.

As we heard in yesterday's debate on women's and girls' safety on public transport, women too often do not feel safe going to or from work for fear of being harassed, intimidated or threatened on public transport. However, we can make decisions both here in this Parliament and in local authorities to stop that and to stop the disadvantages that women face right across Scotland by ensuring that councils do not have to scramble for funding to properly light streets and parks; by delaying the implementation of low-emission zones in Glasgow to protect the black cab trade; and by making public transport more accessible for disabled people.

We can give women in low-paid households their financial independence by introducing split payments for universal credit and other household benefits. We have had the power in Scotland to do that for a number of years now. The next First Minister must use the powers that Scotland has to end the outdated and punitive system of paying universal credit to households, leaving far too many women trapped and financially powerless. I hope that the Government will support the Labour amendment to its motion on that today.

We can defend women's right to choose by supporting Gillian Mackay's buffer zone bill to protect them from harassment and intimidation outside abortion clinics. I welcome the victory in Westminster yesterday for people accessing and providing abortion services in England and Wales. However, it means that Scotland is now officially lagging behind other United Kingdom nations in introducing buffer zones, so I hope that we pick up the pace on that soon.

We can pull women out of poverty, too, by growing the economy and driving up wages in low-paid sectors. We all know that women are disproportionately in low-paid work, often in jobs that are dreadfully undervalued such as care, so our future progress on equality relies on changing that, too. We must rebalance the economy by addressing the disproportionate number of women in those sectors by investing in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, properly resourcing STEM education, and preparing women for jobs for the future.

There is no magic wand that we can wave that means that we will wake up to a more equal world tomorrow. We cannot just expect policy to catch

up by accident, either. We need to fix it by design and take action everywhere. It is the little stuff that adds up to the big stuff—listening to women about where change is needed, working out what is not working and fixing it, and making changes across every single area of Government. That is how we can continue to progress women's equality.

I move amendment S6M-08137.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that using Scottish choices to implement split payments for Universal Credit is key to this, and calls on the Scottish Government to provide an update on progress made on this within this calendar year.”

[Applause.]

15:18

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I, too, associate myself with the comments from the First Minister and Meghan Gallacher about the inspiring event here on Saturday afternoon with the Scottish Women's Convention.

On behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, I welcome the First Minister's announcement of a consultation to reform criminal law to address misogyny, and I trust that the Scottish Government will have an effective awareness campaign about the consultation and how to respond to ensure that as many views as possible are voiced.

This year's international women's day theme is “embrace equity”. Equity is about recognising that people are in different circumstances, which can make it more difficult to achieve the same goals. Inequity most commonly affects marginalised communities such as women, people of colour, disabled people and the LGBT+ community. Engender notes that, in advancing work to end men's violence against all women and girls, we must prioritise the needs of marginalised women at every step. In simple terms, equality is giving everyone shoes; equity is giving everyone shoes that fit.

Patriarchal norms often block women from exercising their right to participate fully in economic life without discrimination. Globally, women and girls do the majority of unpaid care and domestic work and are overrepresented in poorly paid, precarious work.

Eradicating inequality requires an overhaul of the inequitable structures that prevent women from fully participating in the workforce. Research from Scottish Widows shows that, on average, women are retiring with £123,000 less in their pensions than men. Gender imbalances in pay, working patterns and time away from work for caring responsibilities are driving that gap. When talking about women and retirement, we cannot forget the long, on-going fight against state

pension injustice by the 1950s WASPI women—women against state pension inequality. The ombudsman found that there had been maladministration on the part of the Department for Work and Pensions. Sadly, many of those women have since died without receiving any compensation. I declare an interest as a member of the WASPI cross-party group.

Age Scotland found that women over 55 are more likely to have a long-term health condition and that one in three women aged 55 to 64 are unpaid carers. We should recognise the valuable contribution that older women in Scotland make to our society, while challenging the inequality that too many experience. Across work and education settings, we need to understand the different challenges that women face and work to remove those systemic barriers. Globally, girls face additional barriers to education. Recent media reports highlighted the suspected poisoning of schoolgirls in Iran, while women and girls in Afghanistan continue to be systemically excluded from education. Funding feminist movements and women's rights organisations is essential for the delivery of women's and girls' rights. Those groups are grounded in communities, are able to identify the needs of women and girls and deliver services. Women's rights groups also have a vital advocacy role. However, the leadership of women and girls is consistently undervalued. The Scottish Government has committed to establishing a women and girls fund and to mainstreaming gender equality across its international programmes. I echo ActionAid and Oxfam in calling for more details on that work.

Women belong in politics and in Parliament. We still have a long way to go until the make-up of society is reflected in the make-up of our democratic institutions. In the chamber, women make up 45 per cent of participants, compared to 37 per cent in 1999, so we are seeing progress. The Scottish Parliament's on-going work through its “A Parliament for All” report will, I hope, continue that progress.

UN Women highlights that only 11.3 per cent of countries worldwide have female heads of state. Full democracy needs equal participation of women in all its processes. A recent local event stands out in my mind when I reflect on just how far we have come and how far we have to go. During the signing of the islands growth deal in Kirkwall in January, representatives from three island groups, Orkney, the Western Isles and Shetland, were sitting together. I was there with Shetland's political leader and council chief executive, who are both women. That is a sign of changing times and a shift in gender representation. All others around the table were men.

Finally, I take the opportunity to say thank you to Shetland Women's Aid, which is celebrating 40 years of delivering specialist support services to women who have been affected by domestic abuse in Shetland. I pay tribute to the hard-working staff and trustees who provide such an important service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, when we will have speeches from back-bench MSPs of around six minutes. I advise members that we have some time in hand and that there is some latitude in that regard. We also have some time for interventions.

15:24

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I cannot be the only one who gets reflective on international women's day. I have a ritual: I reread my parliamentary speeches from previous years. This will be my seventh consecutive international women's day speech in the Parliament. My yearly ritual tells me that things are still not good enough and that they are not improving anywhere near fast enough. In fact, after I reread the speech that I delivered during the Covid pandemic, a couple of years ago, I realised that, during that period, things got worse for women. The same issues are there, stubbornly, year after year. Reports on economic gender parity back that up with data.

Yesterday, I had a look at this year's women in work index, which is published by PricewaterhouseCoopers. Its report, entitled "Closing the Gender Pay Gap for good: A focus on the motherhood penalty", said that, if things stay at the same rate, it will take 50 years to close the gender pay gap. Therefore, an 18-year-old woman who is at the start of her career today will not see the gender pay gap close in her working lifetime unless policies, attitudes and compulsions on employers change dramatically.

The UK position on the world women in work index has gone down five places since 2020. Some people will say that there is no silver bullet and that it is complicated and too difficult, but I disagree. At the heart of improving women's lives and prospects is the open goal of childcare. The cost and accessibility of childcare prices women out of work; it forces mature women, as grandparents, into early retirement to help their daughters go back to work; and it leads to huge pension gaps.

I tell this story all the time. In 2011, the former Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, was interviewed by the *Washington Post*, and the interviewer asked him for the secret of Norway's economic success. I am sure that the journalist was expecting a reply of "oil and gas", but Stoltenberg simply replied that the secret was

Norway's women. He said that one Norwegian lesson was that raising female participation helps the economy, birth rates and the budget. Of course, Norway has universal free childcare.

Childcare is a national infrastructure. This Government is investing in it, with 1,140 hours provision, and that is maybe why Scotland's gender pay gap is starting to come down and is the lowest in the UK. However, we need to get ourselves into a position to do much more to augment that groundbreaking policy. Yes—increasing the hours of free childcare is an obvious route, but the ultimate goal is to be, like Norway, in a fiscal position to provide universal free childcare, so that all the tax receipts from female participation in effect fund the infrastructure.

However, there is more. Let us look back to that index that I mentioned. Who are the current leaders? Luxembourg is first, followed by New Zealand. In Luxembourg, addressing the gender pay gap and all other forms of gender inequality has become a priority for the public policy agenda. In 2015, Luxembourg established the Ministry of Equality between Women and Men. Unlike any other ministry in the European Union, its sole focus is gender equality. That is all that it does, and that is what it concentrates on. Luxembourg has largely used employment law to get to that point where it can celebrate that position in the table. Luxembourg has made targeted interventions, particularly in high-wage private sectors.

Iceland also has a very good story to tell. Its strategy is highly subsidised and accessible childcare, as well as a high take-up by men of shared parental leave.

Of course, those are small independent countries, which are able to make all their own tax, social security and employment law decisions. Genuinely, my core reason for being in the independence movement is the impact that having all those levers at our disposal could have on the prospects of women, in particular. That is what drives me.

The gender pay gap in Scotland sits at 12.2 per cent; UK-wide, it is 14.9 per cent. The UK does have gender pay gap legislation but, as another international women's day rolls around, I repeat my oft-heard criticism of that legislation, which is that there is no compulsion on the organisations that do the reporting to provide an action plan to reduce the gap if it is wide.

In the absence of that compulsion, I commend the organisations that analyse the yearly reports and call out the companies with the biggest and most persistent gaps. This year, I recommend the Gender Pay Gap Bot Twitter account. I do not

really like Twitter bots, but I like that one. It automatically responds to any organisation or company that tweets—with a nice little graphic or picture of a woman working in that organisation—about international women’s day, and it fires its gender pay gap statistics back at it. It is illuminating and, for some of those companies, many of which operate in Scotland, I hope that it is thoroughly embarrassing.

In the current energy and engineering sector, the gap is stubbornly wide. On the cusp of massive Scottish expansion of renewables, let us change that by targeting more girls to attract them into that sector now. There has been a 70 per cent increase in students of renewables technologies in Scotland, but only 28 per cent of them are women. I am keen to meet the Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, Jamie Hepburn, to discuss how we can improve that.

Closing the gender pay gap could add £17 billion to Scotland’s economy and, if we closed the enterprise gap, with targeted, female-led business support, we would be looking at a £6.7 billion influx into the Scottish economy. As convener of the cross-party group on women in enterprise, I was pleased to hear the First Minister concentrating a great deal of her speech on that issue. Of course, I extend to her an invitation to join the cross-party group in four weeks’ time.

Economic gender parity is not just good for women; it is good for everyone who wants to end poverty and inequality. Serious, targeted work on economic gender parity is the key to reaching that goal. If we prioritise that, we will not have the MSP for Aberdeenshire East giving this same speech in 20 or 30 years’ time.

15:30

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I am delighted to have the chance to speak in the debate. As a Scottish Conservative MSP, I am proud that our party is a party for women. Not only was the first female member of Parliament a Conservative, but the first three—and only—female Prime Ministers have been Conservative. We know what a woman is, and we will always stand up for the rights of women and girls, at home and abroad.

International women’s day is an annual global event that is celebrated on 8 March to recognise the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, as well as to advocate for gender equality and women’s rights.

International women’s day has celebrated the achievements of women for more than 100 years. Despite significant progress in past decades, women still face discrimination and inequality in various aspects of their lives, including access to

education, employment and political representation. This year’s theme is “embrace equity” and encourages people to talk about why equal opportunities are not enough.

I want to focus on sport because, at one point, I was quite fit and active. As a former hockey player and a hockey umpire, I want to touch on some of the remarkable and recent achievements of British women in sport. To contextualise that, I recognise that hockey is a sport that has parity and equality of gender at all levels of the game. In fact, in the lead-up to the Commonwealth games in Glasgow in 2014, it was the women’s team that had greater support and investment, with players being paid as professionals.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry to interrupt, Ms Webber, but I say to members that we have a speaker on the floor and it would be courteous to listen to her.

Sue Webber: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Scottish Hockey Union had limited funds, as many sports do, and it had to choose what its priorities were, and it actively chose to support the women’s side.

Far more recently, at the weekend, there was great success for our woman athletes at the European indoor championships in Istanbul. First, Great Britain’s Keely Hodgkinson retained her 800m title in style, despite the loss of her lifelong coach the previous week. She dedicated her win to him.

Just as Keely Hodgkinson crossed the finish line, the GB team captain, Jazmin Sawyers, won a sensational long jump gold when she jumped exactly 7m. For many, that was an unexpected win, but not for Jazmin. She had been inspired by her teammates and she was absolutely thrilled to complete her winning jump. When she saw Keely Hodgkinson on the track at that same time, there ensued massive supportive and congratulatory hugs and tears, as members can imagine. I think that that is one thing that separates women’s sport from men’s: we are far more team focused and supportive of our team mates at every level.

Also at the weekend, we had further success when Laura Muir won a record fifth European indoor championship title as she claimed victory in the women’s 1,500m final, becoming the most successful Briton in the history of the competition. Breaking down barriers—as Pam Duncan-Glancy said—and, more so, hurdles, she has surpassed Colin Jackson as the British athlete with the most indoor European titles. She spoke of coming to that tournament 10 years ago and of the great progress that she has made since then. That is a bit of an understatement—another point on which women differ from men.

On the other side of the world, we had Eilish McColgan, who set a new British 10,000m record in California. The 32-year-old Scot beat Paula Radcliffe's time, which was set in Munich back in 2002.

Our most successful British tennis player, Andy Murray, has been a champion for women's sport, including tennis, for as long as I can remember. Wimbledon is a great example of male and female athletes receiving equal pay, and I really hope that other sports and competitions will follow suit.

However, as we celebrate the successes that we have in so many sports, we cannot ignore the fundamental differences in biology. I will talk about one specific example. Dr Marshall M Garrett, an independent medical expert, recently authored a report entitled "Overview of Concussional Injuries in Female Rugby from a Medicolegal Perspective", which was undertaken following instructions received in August 2022 from Aberdeen Rugby Ltd.

The objective of the review was to provide an evidence-based opinion on whether concussional injuries in female rugby players occur with greater frequency than in males and whether symptomatology in the female cohort is more severe and/or persistent. The report indicates evidence of significant anatomical and physiological differences between men and women as regards head and neck function, resulting in a lower ability to withstand abrupt head blows and neck acceleration. It stated:

"there is a significant advantage in neck strength and head support ability between appropriately height and body weight matched males ... and females."

Therefore, when it comes to contact sport, in particular, it would be unfair and even unsafe if men were to take part in women's sport.

We cannot escape biology when it comes to sport. From head and neck anatomical differences to differences in bone density and muscle volume, biology makes a difference to performance, and we cannot pretend otherwise.

Although the status of women in Scotland and in the rest of the UK in general has improved, far more work needs to be done to achieve absolute equality between the sexes.

International women's day 2023 provides an opportunity to raise awareness about the issues and to promote a more inclusive and equitable society. Whether it is through advocacy, activism or simple acts of kindness and support, we can all contribute to building a world in which every person has equal opportunities to thrive and succeed, regardless of their gender.

15:37

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): International women's day should be a day of celebration and empowerment. We take stock and mark the immense achievements of women in the face of systemic barriers to those achievements. However, I am not in a celebratory mood.

Undoubtedly, there has been much progress, and the very notion that feminist ideals have become mainstream in our discourse is testament to that. In taking that wider view, I understand the case for optimism; however, there is no room for complacency.

We should think of the brave women in Iran who are systemically subjugated and denied equity of status and basic rights such as access to education. I thank Meghan Gallacher for raising the case of Mahsa Zhina Amini, whose death last year fomented a wave of rebellions from women and the wider population, who are rising up against tyranny in that country.

Women around the world remain subject to profound inequity and, in some cases, state-sanctioned barbarism. We, in western Europe, can become all too complacent in this discussion. Many in liberal democracies blithely assume that women's equality is a fact. What started as a rights movement has become an accepted normative principle, but belief in that principle can be a grievous mistake, because illiberal and populist thinking is rising in countries across Europe.

Only yesterday in the chamber, a debate was held on the safety of women and girls on public transport. Tomorrow's debate focuses on reforming the criminal law to address misogyny. Every woman we meet will have experienced misogyny. Prejudice and misogynistic attitudes are thriving. Some men on social media parade their toxicity, safe in the knowledge that those behaviours still enjoy a level of social acceptability. Harassment, sexual assault and rape remain commonplace.

I thank Beatrice Wishart for mentioning Scottish Women's Aid. My office has helped a number of constituents dealing with domestic abuse and we regularly work with our local Motherwell and District Women's Aid group. Its vital specialist support services are experiencing unprecedented demand and its finances are strained almost to breaking point.

If we are truly to embrace equity, we must recognise that it is not a static fact but a shifting ideal that demands our vigilance and protection if we are to make any progress.

The aim of the 2023 #EmbraceEquity campaign is to get the world thinking about why equal opportunities are not enough. People start from vastly different circumstances, so true inclusion and true progress demand equitable action. That often means positive intervention.

I thank Gillian Martin for highlighting the gender pay gap statistics. In my office, I have a "Mind the Gap" poster that states:

"Prepare your daughter for working life. Give her less pocket money than her brother".

Every single young person who visits my office is perturbed and annoyed by that. "Well, that's not fair," they cry. What happens, from primary school age to adolescence to adulthood, that blinds us to that simple injustice?

The UN is calling for more action to highlight and solve the persistent gender pay gap, the gap in digital access, the underrepresentation of women, girls and other marginalised groups in STEM, both in education and in careers, and the threat of online gender-based violence. It also calls for action to highlight the achievements of women in science and technology. Those are all things that we should be doing.

We have outstanding leaders in Scotland. Dr Silvia Paracchini, Professor Dame Anne Glover, Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Professor Dame Muffy Calder, and Professor Lesley Yellowlees are all pioneers in their field, as is Professor Sheila Rowan, who is leading the way on experimentation with gravitational waves. In my field of computing science, Gillian Docherty is the chief commercial officer at the University of Strathclyde and a former chief executive officer of the Data Lab.

There are also outstanding companies, including Antibody Analytics in my Motherwell and Wishaw constituency, that are co-founded by women and succeeding in initiatives to address gender imbalance in their company.

The First Minister is an inspiration to many of us, not least in her love of literature. I am reminded of one of my literary heroes, Ursula K Le Guin. On being asked to write the foreword to a collection of new fantasy short stories, she wrote:

"I cannot imagine myself blurbing a book, the first of a new series and hence presumably exemplary of the series ... the tone of which is so self-contentedly, exclusively male, like a club, or a locker room. That would not be magnanimity, but foolishness. Gentlemen, I just don't belong here."

She said that in 1987. As the First Minister said, Ursula K Le Guin did belong. All young women deserve to belong in their endeavours in life.

I used to think that the dystopian novels of Le Guin and Margaret Atwood that shaped my

perceptions of the world were just fiction and not portents of what my life experience might be. However, for too many women, what is set out in "The Handmaid's Tale" is close to their reality.

Last year, I read "The Shining Girls" by Lauren Buekes. Part of the book is set around the underground network supporting women who were exercising their reproductive rights in the 1960s. The chapter ends whimsically with a message that people should not worry because a court case is coming that will enshrine those rights "forever". The book was published in 2013. At that time, Roe v Wade seemed unassailable, but look at what is happening in the USA today.

On this international women's day, it is more important than ever to recognise where we are failing and, together, to resolve to achieve not just equality for women but equity for women across the world.

15:44

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Happy international women's day to everyone who is celebrating.

I, too, place on the record my best wishes to Nicola Sturgeon as she counts down the days and hours to leaving the office of First Minister. She is our first woman First Minister but, I hope, not the last—and that is in no way a comment on the leadership contest that is under way. I hope that, regardless of political beliefs and party affiliations, women and girls across Scotland and the UK and, indeed, beyond will have taken inspiration, courage and confidence from the First Minister's commitment to public service. I think that we all agree that leadership is for women and girls, regardless of their background.

Colleagues have been reflecting today on the collective progress that has been made towards achieving equality and equity for women and girls, and there is a lot to celebrate. However, as the First Minister and others have said, there is still a hell of a lot to do.

I turn to historical forced adoption. At First Minister's question time last week, I received a positive indication from the First Minister that the Scottish Government has been listening carefully to the women and families affected by historical forced adoption. I am pleased that the issue was raised and reinforced in the First Minister's speech today. We all know that an apology is due, and I hope that it will happen very soon, in the time that the First Minister has left.

We are joined today by Marion McMillan, who is in the public gallery. Marion's son was taken from her in 1967 simply because she was an unmarried mother. It is really hard to talk about this as a

historical injustice when Marion and her family and thousands of others who have gone through a similar experience are still living with the trauma and its life-changing impacts.

Marion is a survivor of multiple injustices and adversities. In addition to forced adoption, she was subjected to diethylstilbestrol, or DES—the drug that was given to women to dry up their breast milk as their babies were snatched from their arms. We now know that the drug increases the risk of cancer and other diseases. She is also a mesh-injured woman, and it is really a miracle that Marion is here, because she is also living with cancer. I am looking at Marion, and she is not a victim—she is a survivor. She is a warrior woman who has supported and championed countless women not just in Scotland but around the world.

She could not be with us in the public gallery in June 2001, when Parliament spoke with one voice on the need for a formal apology. I am pleased that she is here today, supported by her husband, George, and sitting with another phenomenal woman who also happens to be called Marion—the award-winning journalist Marion Scott, who is the political editor of the *Sunday Post*. Frankly, she has fought for justice for these women's families when so many others in the media were simply not interested. We need warrior women in our media, too.

Forced adoption has left emotional scars on mothers, fathers, adoptees and extended families. None of us can change what happened, but we can acknowledge the harm that was caused through a formal apology, alongside a plan for access to specialist trauma-informed support and better access to adoption records.

Esther Robertson describes herself as a mixed-race black girl who grew up in a white adoptive family during the 1960s and 1970s. She was taken from her mother, Ann Bruce Lindenberg. I know that the First Minister might have more time soon, and I recommend that she and all colleagues listen to the podcast “Looking for Esther”, which is on Spotify. It was written and produced by Esther's partner, Gayle Anderson, and it is about Esther's 50-year search for answers on her birth parents, her background and her identity. It is a really important perspective.

While I am name-checking women, I have a wee gift for the First Minister, as I know that she likes books. It is “Adoption and Loss” by Evelyn Robinson—a Scottish woman who left our nation in 1970 after her son was taken. Evelyn was instrumental in ensuring the Australian adoption apology. I have several copies of the book in my office and I can provide them if other colleagues want to speak to me after today's business. There is so much that we need to learn from these women, and I feel that we are finally getting there.

I mentioned the drug that was given to Marion McMillan. Colleagues know that I am passionate about women's health. Over a year ago now, at a round-table discussion, we heard from Caitlin McCarthy, who is an American educator and award-winning screenwriter of an upcoming feature film about the DES drug disaster. She was inspired to write about that because she is a DES daughter.

There are so many more women to mention, but I have only a few seconds left. I also want to talk about period dignity, which other members have mentioned. At the weekend, I had the privilege of being a guest speaker at the University of Cambridge, and I want to let colleagues know that the work that we are doing collectively in Scotland on period equality is creating waves around the world.

I heard from Dr Zareen Roohi Ahmed, who has been inspired to set up a charity and a business to get free period products to as many people as possible, and particularly to women in refugee camps. She was inspired to do so because her daughter had a dream and vision but was abducted and murdered when she was 19. I did not want to dwell on violence against women today, but we should not have to turn to such dark times to find a way forward for gender equality.

I am running out of time, and there is so much more to say. I ask all colleagues, if they have not already done so, to download the PickupMyPeriod app and get it on their smartphones and other devices. Shona Robison and I had a really good meeting last week. Excellent work on period products is happening in local government, but we all have to tell our constituents how they can access those products.

I will finish with a short quote from Dolly Parton, because Cher got a name check and I do not want to leave out Dolly. We want all women to believe in themselves, so all that I want to say is:

“Find out who you are and do it on purpose.”

[*Applause.*]

15:51

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow Monica Lennon, who is perhaps another warrior woman.

In my contribution to today's international women's day debate, I want to look forward with ambition, but I will begin by looking back for inspiration, and I can find that aplenty in my constituency of Argyll and Bute. For example, there is Ella Carmichael, who was born on Lismore in 1870. She was an editor and scholar and is remembered as a supporter of the Scottish Gaelic language. There is Eliza Maria Campbell,

who was born in 1795 in Inveraray and was a skilled painter and keen horticulturist who took up the study of fossils. There is Margaret McKellar, who was born on the Isle of Mull in 1861. She became a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and went as a medical missionary to central India. I will quickly mention another person who has an island connection in my constituency: Lady Astor, whose family has an estate there. She was the second woman elected to Westminster, after Connie Markievicz, an Irish nationalist, in 1918.

Those women opened the door and gave others a glimpse of what could be achieved. I am very much a believer that looking back and learning are essential to moving forward.

On Saturday, I was in the chamber with more than 200 women who all represented the many colours and aspects of life in Scotland, at an event that was organised by the wonderful Scottish Women's Convention. As others have said, that was the 20th anniversary of the gathering, so there was much celebration of what has been achieved in Scotland for women. We have the baby box, increased free childcare provision and legislation to improve representation on public boards, as well as the fact that Scotland was the first country to make period products free, along with many more examples.

However, we were also challenged as to what still needs to be done to achieve and maintain equity and to maintain the momentum. That challenge comes from two directions. Outlining the first aspect was Dr Radhika Govinda, who is a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Edinburgh. She spoke about the importance of recognising that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and that, therefore, we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people, be that gender, race, class, sexual orientation or physical ability. Dr Govinda suggested that our challenge is to understand and address all potential roadblocks to an individual's or group's wellbeing. It is only if we see those roadblocks as a whole that they can be overcome.

The second challenge was outlined by Zara De Almeida and Grace Lennon, both of whom are senior students at Our Lady's high school in Cumbernauld, as Meghan Gallacher mentioned. They spoke not only about their admiration for women whom they know, such as their mums, teachers and friends, but about women whom they respect for what they have achieved: Malala Yousafzai, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and our own First Minister.

They challenged everyone in the chamber to imagine what they wanted to see in 20 years' time—creating a better future by imagining it now

and setting high ambitions. Both had attended the Parliament for international women's day last year and, as a result, they took part in roadshows that were organised by the Scottish Women's Convention. The convention works closely with women in Scotland to ensure that their voices are heard as part of decision-making processes, and I thank it for its incredibly important work.

Zara and Grace were both clear that they felt included and listened to. They said that it was refreshing that they had a voice and were not being ignored. They felt that they were being seen and were part of an invaluable community. Their clear message was that, in 20 years' time, women—all women—will be equal and that they deserve fairness. Normality should be for women to expect respect. I have paraphrased their wonderful contributions and have certainly not delivered my speech with the poise and confidence that they both showed on Saturday.

I say to colleagues that I think that the future of women in Scotland and across the world is safe in the hands of those young women and many others like them. They will certainly work together to ensure that the equity that is necessary for society and the economy to thrive is delivered. As legislators, we must not let them down and must work with them to fulfil that dream.

Returning to Argyll and Bute, I will mention a fantastic young woman who is daring to be different. Jodie Sloss, who grew up on a croft in Tighnabruaich, is now setting the motor racing world alight. She started her racing career on horseback, but she has swapped to the horsepower of motor sport. Competing against an international field of more than 1,000 entrants, Jodie competed in the 2022 Formula Woman competition in the UK, making it to the final 70 who took part in ice driving. It was on a frozen lake in Sweden that Jodie's raw talent shone through, and she was chosen to be the first Scottish driver in the Formula Woman GT cup championship team. Jodie puts her success down to driving on Argyll and Bute's tight, narrow roads.

I am pleased that Jodie will be joining me in the Parliament tomorrow to meet the sports minister, Maree Todd. We will discuss Jodie's experiences in motor sport, the benefits that her journey has given her and how those might be spread around Scotland. Who knows? She might even give me some tips on how to negotiate those tight, narrow Argyll and Bute roads.

The women I have mentioned are hugely varied, but they all share at least one thing: burning ambition to be the best that they can be. Those wonderful women have shown us the way. Let us all share that ambition.

[Applause.]

15:57

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I begin by recognising, as others have done, that this is, I think, the last debate in the chamber that the First Minister will take part in as First Minister. It is appropriate that that is happening on international women's day. I thank the First Minister for her leadership, especially on the issue that is before us today. Although we still have work to do, Scotland is better able than it might otherwise have been without Nicola Sturgeon's leadership to tackle the various issues of gender inequity that we face—so thank you.

I also thank the women across Scotland who work hard to support other women, through paid or unpaid work, as family members or friends, as colleagues or as strangers, and I thank the community groups and organisations that work every day to further gender equality and to support women. I know some such organisations very well—I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Under this year's international women's day theme, we are told to embrace equity. This afternoon, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves exactly what that means. Equity is not just a synonym for equality or a way to ring the changes on a well-worn tune; equity is something different that asks more of us and that offers more to those for whom we speak.

In some legal traditions, equity has long been understood and recognised. It is a fairness that goes beyond the common law, addressing the ways in which simply adhering to standard practice does not bring about justice.

Equity is about situations in which equality is not enough. That is illustrated by the familiar drawing of children behind a fence. To see what is happening on the other side of the fence, the littlest need the largest boxes to stand on.

Equity is about situations when we do not know exactly what justice requires. It is no coincidence that we speak not of intergenerational equality but of intergenerational equity. The needs of future generations—the women and girls of the future—depend on the decisions that we make now.

We know, as ActionAid and Oxfam reminded us this week, that our overlapping crises—of cost and climate, food and fuel, housing and habitats—all carry brutally gendered impacts. Unless our choices now are informed by equity, those disparities will widen into unbridgeable gulfs of suffering and despair.

Equity is demanding of everyone involved. It demands honesty, integrity and attention to nuance and granular detail. Whoever comes to equity, says the old legal adage, must come with

clean hands. It is not an easy option. It is not a weapon for playing political games or constructing moral panics. If we are, indeed, to embrace equity, as feminists, we must be clear about what it requires from us and from the communities that we help to build.

First of all, equity needs to be intersectional. We must remember the visceral force of Kimberlé Crenshaw's original metaphor. For the women who stand in those junctions, heavy traffic thundering towards them from all sides—misogyny, racism and transphobia—equity is not a nice idea but a life-saving necessity.

There are many intersections that we do not know enough about. Age Scotland has highlighted, for example, the lack of data about older disabled women, older women of colour and older LGBTQIA+ women. Unless we know who we are talking about, where they are and what they need, our strategies will be mere well-meaning hopes.

Secondly, equity must be grounded in the particular, and it must be recognised that no woman's experience is the same as another's and that each bears her unique story. Hearing those stories must not be an afterthought—a colourful illustration of the narrative that we have already decided to tell. As representatives, policy makers and legislators, we must listen, not merely hear.

Thirdly, equity must also be collective. We must recognise our shared experiences of the particular and stand in solidarity as allies for as long as it takes. Our equity cannot come from the top down; it must be nurtured and grown by those who need it most. Processes of equity must be truly participatory and truly iterative. We will not always succeed, but we can definitely fail better.

Fourthly and finally, the equity that we seek to embrace is inclusive. We must build on the best of all that has gone before. It does not need to choose between justice and care. Indeed, it must not choose between them but be deeply imbued with the ethics of both. The giving of care is central to the daily lives of thousands of women in Scotland and millions across the world, but so is the experience of injustice. There is no incongruity between recognising the deep human value of the care—paid or unpaid—that many women give and saying that they, their daughters and their granddaughters deserve better.

We can do better and do differently, not just in Scotland but, as we take our place on the global stage, in developing and enacting a genuinely feminist foreign policy. War, climate change, conflict and forced migration exacerbate all oppressions, precarities and social and gender disparities. Only the most meticulous care and the

most radical justice can address them. We embrace those. We embrace equity.

To close, I share Rebekah Bastian's words on gender equity, with due apologies for what some might consider to be an inappropriate word:

"Race, religion",
identity,

"and nationality
Age, ability and sexuality
There is no one size fits all strategy
To empowering woman equitably ...

We need to remember women's many identities
And then create systems that work towards equity
This is more than a list or some boxes to check
We have multi-dimensional matrices to inspect

To break down the 50 percent into stories
And understand women in all of their glory
But the hard work is worth it, without a doubt
We have too much untapped talent just waiting to come out

We're all here right now because we give a shit
About gender equity. And this is it."

16:04

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie)
(SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on international women's day. This year's theme is "embrace equity", which brings a focus on the fact that people start from different places and that, therefore, true inclusion and belonging bring equitable action. The theme clearly recognises the fact that equity is not just nice to have—it is a must-have. That point was articulated well by the First Minister in her contribution, and I was pleased to see her opening today's debate.

It must be acknowledged that the First Minister has done a great deal in leading the Scottish Government and making significant progress on achieving equity. I pay tribute to everything that she has done and achieved since becoming Scotland's first female First Minister. As has already been mentioned, she brought in Scotland's first gender-balanced Cabinet. Her leadership has been strong and determined, but perhaps she will not miss First Minister's question time every week, when all the Opposition parties' male leaders line up to shout.

Of course, it is not just up to women to achieve equity. This morning, I met community representatives at Clydebank town hall for a flag-raising event to highlight international women's day. There was strong support for the event, and it was good to raise awareness in that manner. We are a strong community. I pay tribute to Women's Aid and the wider support groups in my constituency. They are a tower of strength to many women at the time of their greatest need. Quite simply, they have saved lives and supported

women. That is why one of the features of international women's day must be remembering all those strong and determined women who have gone before us and what they have achieved.

There are so many to mention, but one such woman with a strong connection to my constituency is Jane Rae. She was a political activist who took part in the Singer sewing machine factory strike in 1911. Jane was among the 400 workers who were sacked for their involvement in the strike, which ran from March to April in 1911. From 1922 until 1928, she served on Clydebank Town Council. She was part of an anti-war network and a supporter of the suffragette movement. She even chaired a meeting with Emmeline Pankhurst in Clydebank town hall.

Jane is especially famous for her role in the Clydebank rent strike, which has been described as one of the key events in the legend of red Clydeside. If we could muster just a small part of the energy that Jane showed to secure equity, we would achieve so much. It is right that we are fuelled by her achievements and those of many others.

When striving for equity, we must also reflect on what has been achieved by the Scottish Government and our Parliament. Those achievements include the introduction of the world-leading Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, which made psychological domestic abuse and controlling behaviour a crime; the publication of the women's health plan to reduce inequalities in health outcomes and improve information in services for women; the appointment of our first women's health champion; the expansion of free childcare, to make available 1,140 hours of childcare a year to all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds; the full mitigation of the benefit cap and the introduction of the Scottish child payment, with no Westminster-like two-child benefit policy and its abhorrent rape clause; the carers allowance supplement, which corrects a wrong that was created and maintained by successive Westminster Governments; the collaborative work on period poverty, which has already been mentioned and which enshrined in law access to free period products; the implementation of the equally safe strategy, to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls and to tackle the underlying attitudes that perpetuate it; and the refreshed fair work action to tackle the drivers of the gender pay gap.

Those are significant milestones. However, as a woman and, indeed, the first female MSP for Clydebank and Milngavie, I know that much more needs to be done.

In Scotland, the gender pay gap is lower than it is in the rest of the UK, but it is still a significant

and major barrier to equity. With the burdens of caring still falling on women—although improved assistance to unpaid carers is welcome—we also want to see the new carers assistance recognise the further reforms that are needed.

The Poverty Alliance has highlighted that women are twice as dependent on social security as men. The UK social security system is not fit for purpose, and increases to conditionality for women with children have made it worse. We need to address that through further devolution and a minimum income guarantee for all.

Those are just some of the things that we need to fix if we are to make further progress. However, let us celebrate international women's day and push for the equity that all women deserve.

16:09

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am glad that the Cher lyrics that Pam Duncan-Glancy quoted were not

"If I could turn back time",

especially in this context.

It gives me great pleasure to follow all the other contributions from right across the chamber today, and I align myself with many of the comments that have been made.

It is testament to the achievements, bravery and dedication of women who have gone before us that so many women are here today, and not only in this chamber but in Parliaments and Assemblies across the United Kingdom and, indeed, the world.

It has been 105 years since women were given the right to vote and 95 years since women got to vote on equal terms with men in the UK. Since then, we have collectively campaigned for equality at work, access to birth control and healthcare, education, economic opportunity and recognition of past sins, and we have begun to enshrine gender equality in domestic and international law. We have achieved so much in the past 105 years, but there is so much more that we can and must do.

As is my way, it is time for the personal anecdote. I was recently at a constituency visit in Rosyth, for the cutting of the steel for the new frigate, where I was chatting to another woman who was originally from Canada and who worked in the civil service. We bonded over our positions, the effects that our jobs have on family life and the fact that we are women. The conversation moved on to the erosion of woman's rights around the world, with the examples of changing abortion laws, the banning of education for girls, beatings for ill-worn headwear and on-going gender concerns. When we were mid-discussion, an ex-

councillor from Perth—whom I know—came over to say hello, and we proceeded to bring him up to speed on our conversation. His response was to tell us that we were wrong. He then proceeded to tell us that women's rights had not moved back at all—with no evidence for his statement other than self-assured protestation. In effect, he cancelled our truth.

I did not mention that incident to highlight the behaviour of the gentleman in question—because that happens daily to women in business, politics, public life and in the home, all over the world. I brought it up because I said nothing—neither of us did. I did not stand up. I let the conversation dwindle, and, soon after that, we all went on to talk to others at the event. As the motion highlights, it is the responsibility of everyone to end the discrimination that women and girls face, and that can be done in the simplest of ways. Calling out everyday prejudice and that baseless assertion would have been a good start, and I promise that I will not let what happened then happen again.

The Scotland that I know is not a nation to look inward. International women's day gives us all a chance to be reminded of what and who has gone before us, and of how we can pave the way for a better future for those who are still to come. However, in recent years authoritarian leaders have launched assaults on women's rights and democracy that threaten to roll back decades of progress on both fronts.

Across the world, there are women and girls who are still treated horrifically. The Taliban—the self-declared government of Afghanistan—promised that girls would be able to access education; they are not in education. Women were promised that they would be able to continue to work or go to university or to work; they are not permitted any of those freedoms. If they are caught studying or working, they are met with such severe punishment that it can lead to death—and in some cases it has. Those women are being made to feel that they are being punished simply for being women.

Horia Mosadiq was a girl when Russia invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Now, Horia works at Amnesty International. She said:

"Afghan women were the ones who lost most from the war and militarisation."

They lost all the freedoms that had become the norm across the country in a matter of weeks.

In Iran, women have been sent to jail for publicly speaking out in favour of equal rights for women. The Ayatollah described the notion of gender equality as

"unacceptable to the Islamic Republic."

The death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old student who died on 16 September 2022 after morality police beat her, apparently for wearing a loose hijab, was the catalyst for the new wave of protest. Protesters have adopted the Kurdish slogan “woman, life, freedom” as their rallying cry, and they have taken to the streets to demand political freedom in the face of internet blackouts, mass arrests and live-fire attacks by security services.

Women are continuing to stand up. Many thousands of nameless, faceless women are standing side by side and demanding that their voices are heard. We stand in the Parliament, time and time again, naming the person who is the face of a campaign—and quite rightly so—but a leader is only as strong as the people who stand behind them, and it is they who, I believe, need special recognition.

We agree that there is more to do in Scotland and around the world to achieve and maintain equity, and those wonderful women are taking the challenge head on, and our example is set. We must never lose sight of the fact that there is still so much more to fight for if we are to drive forward the rights of women and girls at home and across the world.

On a final note, it is imperative that we support one another and that men and women work together to embrace equity, here and across the globe. We need to big up one another and to cheer for our achievements. Men, I speak to you now, because equity is about fairness, and it is a role that you should all embrace. Stand with women, because change can come only from a joint will to make it. We must support our daughters and educate our sons. We must live in an equal society, and we must fight to achieve that. We want men to encourage, support and help, so I ask: will you do that?

16:15

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I am really happy to speak in the debate, and I am honoured to be the first male member to do so on this very important day—international women’s day. I thank our First Minister for bringing the important issue of embracing equity to the chamber. She has been a role model for a lot of women in the world. I thank her for that.

International women’s day is a day to celebrate women’s achievements, to raise awareness of discrimination and to move towards gender equality. Gender equality is not just an issue for women; it is one for everyone to pay attention to, including men. I get told that every day. I grew up with five sisters and 21 cousin sisters, and I now

have a daughter who reminds me of that every day.

We must all be present to listen to the experiences of women and girls and to join in the conversation. International women’s day was originally set up to help to draw attention to women’s right to vote, but its initiatives have changed in line with the issues that are most pressing in society. In response to the armed conflicts that were happening worldwide, international women’s day 2010 highlighted the struggle of displaced women.

Women and children make up almost 80 per cent of displaced people. We are again seeing the displacement of women and children with the war in Ukraine. Women are being displaced at a higher rate, and there have been reports of people trafficking, which disproportionately affects female refugees. I spoke about the need to protect refugee women in the Scottish Government’s debate to mark one year of war in Ukraine.

Today, I want to draw attention to the important theme of this year’s international women’s day: embracing equity. Ensuring that every woman and girl be provided with an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or social or economic background, must be a priority for this Parliament. Equity is vital to making sure that international women’s day is inclusive for all women and girls across Scotland.

For that reason, on this international women’s day, I want to draw attention to ethnic and religious minority women. Many ethnic and religious minority women experience misogyny and sexism in different ways, and, if we want to tackle sexism and misogyny, we must recognise the multiplicity of experiences.

Yesterday, my colleagues spoke about the safety of women and girls on public transport. Many spoke about the worrying statistic that around half of women and girls feel uncomfortable using public transport after dark, and the fact that many women have no choice other than to take an expensive taxi, as they do not feel safe taking public transport or walking home alone. The Scottish Government must do better to ensure that women and girls are able to travel safely and without fear or harassment, no matter the situation or time of day.

The feeling of danger when walking alone at night or taking public transport alone is shared by women across Scotland, but ethnic and religious minority women have the added fear of discriminatory behaviour to factor into their safety.

Some Muslim women wear a hijab or niqab that represents a sign of modesty and faith in their religion. Because of that religious choice, they

face violence, discrimination, and harassment. I have been told of cases of Muslim women avoiding train stations altogether out of fear that someone would push them on to the tracks.

Recent reports on Islamophobia in the UK have found that women are much more likely to be targeted than men, but violence against women and girls is not the only way that ethnic and religious minority women face further inequality. In employment, the gender pay gap for ethnic minority women is even wider. In sport, black, Asian and ethnic minority women and girls suffer from particularly low levels of involvement. In higher education, academic positions are dominated by white people, and senior roles are predominantly held by men.

Embracing equity means acknowledging the added discrimination and inequality that women and girls from ethnic and religious minority backgrounds face. Embracing equity means recognising that different resources and opportunities must be provided to strive for an equal outcome for all women and girls. Embracing equity means reaching full equality for all women.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I call Natalie Don, who is the final speaker in the open debate.

16:21

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): International women's day means something different to everyone. Of course, celebrating the achievements of women and scrutinising the progress that is still to be made come front and centre, but there are many different issues surrounding equality and how we achieve it. All women have very different experiences and priorities, as has been accurately reflected in the debate today.

Women are still disproportionately impacted by poverty. In Scotland, that is even worse than it was last year, with women having been hit hardest by the cost of living crisis. Women are still more likely to have caring responsibilities and to depend on social security, so of course they are directly impacted by the benefit cap and the two-child limit. The cost of living crisis is just compounding inequalities.

If we are to truly embrace equity in order to build a more diverse, equitable and inclusive society, tackling poverty must be at the absolute core of what we do. Women will never be able to be the best that they can be when they are living in poverty. Although that is true of any person, women in Scotland are disproportionately impacted.

I turn to Parliament and politics. As part of this year's international women's day, Engender is calling on MSPs to act for women's equity by supporting equal representation for women and marginalised groups in politics, and I absolutely support that. We are doing well in Scotland on that front and the difference that that is making is clear. Over the past few years, I have been so proud to hear more and more women's issues being raised and discussed in Parliament. At one time in our history, it would have had to be international women's day for issues such as periods, women's safety, perinatal mental health, menopause or breastfeeding to make it to the forefront—but not any longer. It is so refreshing to speak openly and honestly about those things.

Thanks to the representation of women in this Parliament, more and more policies and legislation are being passed with the aim of advancing women's rights. Just look at the women's health plan, the women's health champion and key policies including the expansion of early learning, which has unquestionably broken down so many barriers for women.

However, although more and more women's issues are being raised and debated, structures and attitudes are not moving quickly. I have experienced sexism and misogyny in Parliament and have witnessed it on countless occasions. Most of the women who are here today will have experienced abuse on social media, and many will have been questioned in ways that no man would ever be questioned.

I always think back to one of the first things that happened to me when I was first elected as a local councillor. When I attended my first community council meeting, someone told me that they did not like the jumper that I wore in my photo that had gone on the council website. I know that the women in the chamber will understand how deflating that was. I was attending my first community council as a councillor and, before I had even opened my mouth, I was being judged on my choice of clothes in a picture rather than on my priorities, my views or my work to date. It is sad that I and many others continue to have such experiences on a daily basis.

I also have concerns about the "family friendly" label that the Parliament has. I have a one-year-old and a three-year-old at home, so I have direct experience of the issue. There have been no childcare facilities in the Parliament since before the pandemic. My attendance at cross-party group meetings and parliamentary receptions is almost out of the question if I want to make it home for story time. The timing of debates is so unpredictable that it is impossible to be a reliable parent. That impacts not just on members but on staff and the public.

I say that not so that people will feel sorry for me or for politicians, but to emphasise that there are still huge barriers to women entering politics. That is true of so many spheres in which women have historically had less involvement than men have had. How can we possibly hope to inspire more women to enter politics when the system is not yet ready for them and attitudes still need to move on?

I once heard someone say, during a discussion on similar issues, “Well, that’s politics for you.” They were promoting the idea that someone who enters politics has to accept the institution for what it is. That is such a dangerous way of thinking. Politics and the establishment were all built for men, by men, around men, so it is no wonder that the system does not fit with the lives of women in the 21st century.

We need women in Parliament because that means more women’s issues are at the forefront of the conversation. Likewise, we need more mothers, more disabled women, more women who come from poverty and more women from different ethnic groups. As we work to encourage women into politics, we need to ensure that we break down barriers and make the structural change that is needed so that Parliament, politics and all other spheres work for women just as much as they work for men.

I was pleased to see the recommendations that emerged from the Parliament’s gender sensitive audit, and I look forward to their being progressed.

I want to speak briefly about historical misogyny. A year ago today, the First Minister made an apology to the women who were historically convicted of witchcraft. Not long after that, I lodged my proposal for a witchcraft convictions pardons bill. My members’ bill proposal received a lot of support, naturally, but a lot of people also told me that it was a waste of time.

I want to respond, briefly, right here and right now on international women’s day. We absolutely have to look to the past if we are to tackle issues such as misogyny in the modern day, because it is in history and tradition that stereotypes and misogyny are manifested. It is unacceptable that women who were accused of witchcraft, arrested and, at times, beaten, starved and brutally raped, are still labelled as criminals in the eyes of the law. I do not want my children growing up in a society where that is the case.

On this international women’s day, let us commit to continuing to look at our behaviours, past and present, and to tackle the inequalities that still exist in society. *[Applause.]*

16:28

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): That was an absolutely excellent speech by Natalie Don; 100 per cent of this afternoon’s speeches have been excellent, and I have enjoyed them all.

On international women’s day, it is important for us to reflect on how far we have come and to discuss what we have yet to achieve.

As other members have done, I want to recognise what Scotland’s first woman First Minister has accomplished not just in the United Kingdom and Scotland, but internationally. I know that that is true, because when I was on a recent visit to Jordan—Nicola Sturgeon knows about my passion for the middle east—someone found out that I was from Scotland and asked, “Oh, do you know Nicola Sturgeon?” I said, “I’ve never heard of her.” *[Laughter.]* Seriously, I did. The First Minister is laughing.

From a private conversation that I had recently with Nicola Sturgeon, it turns out that we share a passion that I should not really reveal—all I will say is that it begins with “sh” and ends with “oes”.

I want to say something personally to Nicola Sturgeon. You might not recall this but, in 2011, I found myself losing my seat. I kind of thought that it would happen, but my team were devastated. All that I will say is that I will not forget the kind words that you said to me back then. I thank you for that and I thank you for the service that you have given this Parliament, in public life.

Today, I also want to reflect, as others have done, on the position of women and girls around the world—in particular, the position of women in Afghanistan. That is important to mention because Afghanistan is the only country in the world in which education of girls is actually banned. Some poor countries are trying very hard to get girls educated, so it is a disaster and it is shocking that girls in Afghanistan cannot be educated at secondary-school level.

Women and girls across our country face many issues that have been mentioned by our First Minister and others. However, we must draw attention to the struggles of women and girls around the world, in conflict zones and in regimes that deny fundamental human rights. If I may, I will mention, because it is a passion of mine, the Palestinian women who suffer deeply in occupied Palestine because of a lack of healthcare and a lack of fundamental rights.

I had the privilege on Monday of representing Labour at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. The assembly recognised 25 years of peace in Northern Ireland. I and other colleagues had the privilege of listening to former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and other key people who were

around 25 years ago, including Sir John Holmes. They talked about how difficult it was to get the peace agreement signed 25 years ago and how different it might have been had people like John Major, Tony Blair and others not been sitting round the table.

However, importantly, we also heard from the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, which was set up at around that time. I have to say that I did not know much about it until I heard about the role of women in achieving peace and about their being party to the agreement. That is something that we do not hear about often, but it is crucial. The Women's Coalition also had the job of trying to get women to stand for local elections and went from no candidates to 79 candidates in a matter of weeks. Those amazing brave women should be recognised for what they did.

I give way to Emma Harper, who was also at the meeting.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I was at BIPA as well and was struck by the words of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and how effective it had been in promoting sustainable peace in Ireland.

Does Pauline McNeill agree that we need to highlight the work of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the importance of women being engaged and included in peace processes in Ireland and conflict zones anywhere in the world, and that we need to value the contribution that women can make to lasting and sustainable peace across the world?

Pauline McNeill: The role of women is absolutely vital in resolving conflicts around the world. I am absolutely certain that the role of women is also absolutely vital in keeping peace.

The Westminster Government has completely abandoned human rights and its duties in relation to asylum seekers. I have to say that, because it is something that I feel strongly about. If there is to be no legal route through which people can claim asylum, it will be impossible for women and children to flee regimes under which their lives and liberties are threatened. It is important to say that in this debate.

In Scotland today, asylum-seeking women are experiencing increasing food insecurity, women with caring responsibilities are struggling to afford essential items, and single mothers are facing further pressure in keeping their households afloat on a single income. As others have said, sexism, misogyny and gender inequality are still so deeply rooted in our society that, sadly, they have become normalised.

Therefore, Scottish Labour—as Pam Duncan-Glancy said in opening the debate for Labour—is

committed to pushing for change. Last year, we launched a consultation that proposes a long-term strategic response to ending, once and for all time, gender-based violence in Scotland. There is some excellent work by the Scottish Government on that: I welcome what Nicola Sturgeon said about the importance of justice, in that regard.

Tackling women's poverty and continued economic inequality is also critical to realising gender equality and embracing equity in Scotland. It is absolutely clear that the escalating cost of living crisis is resulting in untold harm being done to women. It is deepening gender inequality at a time when women continue to experience the fallout from the on-going Covid-19 pandemic.

In Scotland, women make up the majority of people who are employed in temporary work and on zero-hours contracts, which means that they are disproportionately exposed to worry about the reduced hours, unemployment and underemployment that are associated with precarious work.

Young women are full of power and promise, but many are held back by inequality and sexist attitudes. Unfortunately, they are the same, if not worse, sexist attitudes that their foremothers experienced. As I and other members have said in many debates, we have a serious duty in that regard. We would have expected, by 2023, to see a massive difference in the level of sexism. However, if anything, in some respects it is getting worse.

During the pandemic, young women—especially black and minority ethnic women, as well as those on low-incomes—were less likely to have their furloughed salaries topped up by their employers. Scottish Labour believes that work that is considered to be “women's work” should be properly valued, so we repeat our call for an immediate pay rise to at least a £12 per hour in social care.

Presiding Officer, I have gone well over my time. I will cut to the end and say that the debate has been excellent. Monica Lennon quoted Dolly Parton and Pam Duncan-Glancy quoted Cher, so I will quote Beyoncé. In the future, “Who run the world?” I hope that it will be women and girls.

16:36

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I join Monica Lennon in welcoming Marion and George McMillan and Marion Scott to the gallery. The unimaginable cruelty of forced adoption is something that I do not think that any of us can fully comprehend. I have three girls and I cannot imagine what it would have been like for me to have been forced to give them up. On behalf of the Opposition, I welcome

and echo the First Minister's words and say sorry on behalf of the Parliament to all those who suffered. We can never make up for the trauma that you went through, but I hope that the apology from the nation is some small comfort.

Today is a good day to be a woman in Scotland and the United Kingdom. That is not to say that better times do not lie ahead. On that note, I wish Nicola Sturgeon all the best in whatever the rest of her political career brings. For a woman who is living and growing up here, today can be a day to celebrate, proud of all that women have achieved in this world and looking forward to a future that is unencumbered by misogynistic barriers of old.

I listened with interest to Beatrice Wishart, who spoke about women who have been prevented from fully participating in the workforce, and the inequalities faced by older women, who, as she quite rightly said, have much to offer. Gillian Martin spoke about the need to work to narrow the gender pay gap, and Pauline McNeill and Natalie Don spoke about the impact of the rising cost of living on women.

In contrast to the freedom that women and girls have here, it is important that we acknowledge women in other parts of the world who, by virtue of their biology, are denied so many of the rights that we take for granted.

Today in the chamber, we join millions across the world in celebrating international women's day. My colleagues Meghan Gallacher and Clare Adamson spoke about violations of women's rights across the globe. Foysoyl Choudhury highlighted the plight of displaced women in war, particularly in Ukraine. In Afghanistan, there will be no celebration. Instead, Afghan women face subjugation. In the UK, women are well ahead of men in university admissions, but this year, no women in Afghanistan will even have the opportunity to apply. Indeed, under the Taliban Government, education at any level has become all but inaccessible for women and girls.

ActionAid has welcomed the women and girls empowerment fund that the Scottish Government has launched, but it wants to see evidence of how the fund will work in practice, because the detail is yet to be published. It is important for the Scottish Government to monitor that.

In 1979, when the UK's first female Prime Minister was elected, there ceased to be any limits on what a woman in Britain could achieve in politics, as my colleague Sue Webber mentioned. However, there are still countries where for women to participate in democracy is to put their lives on the line. I believe that that point is worth dwelling on for a minute.

Organisations such as Women2Win have championed the participation of women in politics,

and people such as Theresa May and Anne Jenkin have been at the forefront of that work to ensure that hundreds of women are elected to public office. I am very proud to be part of that organisation, which does so much to further the role of women in politics.

However, while we enjoy that support and encouragement, women in patriarchal societies continue to have their suffrage—never mind their prospects of election to public office—suppressed through violence, intimidation and regressive national attitudes. Today, we must call out the countries that have those attitudes and suppress women's suffrage, and I have no doubt that everyone in this chamber will join me in doing so.

Of course, internationally, suffrage is not the only issue that women must contend with. Time will, most certainly, not permit me to cover everything, but, since hosting a debate in 2021 on endometriosis, which blights the lives of so many women in Scotland and internationally, I have been keen to understand the global picture of women's health.

During cervical cancer awareness month, in January, we heard from Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust that Malawi has the highest levels of mortality related to that dreadful disease. With our sights set on eliminating cervical cancer as a public health problem here, it is important to acknowledge the disparities in women's health across the globe, particularly in relation to largely preventable diseases, such as cervical cancer. Resources for healthcare might be scarce where that disease is most prevalent, but the taboo nature of women's health in some of those areas can also act as a barrier to treatment and prevention. Cervical cancer is not the only disease that has a higher prevalence where those attitudes persist. Rates of sexually transmitted diseases and blood-borne viruses are higher in many countries that are typically perceived as being patriarchal.

Closer to home, women's health concerns still require more attention. I pay tribute to my colleague, Douglas Ross, who has persistently and passionately campaigned to reinstate consultant-led maternity services at Dr Gray's hospital in Elgin.

Pam Duncan-Glancy also brought up a really important point when she spoke about the need for safe access to women's healthcare, particularly in relation to Gillian Mackay's recent abortion services summit, which we attended, on creating buffer zones to protect women when they access safe healthcare.

I go back to endometriosis. It is clear that we have a lot more work to do in Scotland to improve women's healthcare services. I have recently

spoken to women who poignantly talked about the impact that that debilitating condition has on their life. Women wait a long time for diagnosis, never mind treatment. During that time, the condition can leave them crippled with pain and sometimes unable to work.

I recently wrote to the newly appointed Scottish Government women's health champion to highlight women's concerns and call for the establishment of a specialist service covering each health board in Scotland. I very much look forward to receiving her response and to working with the Scottish Government and the cross-party group on women's health to improve health services for women across the country. This morning's news that a new treatment for endometriosis is being trialled across the country is also incredibly welcome.

Just as Jenni Minto spoke about Jodie and her motor sport ambitions, and her Argyll and Bute constituency, I want to finish my speech by talking about some of the incredible achievements of women from my constituency in the Borders over the past year. I congratulate Lana Skeldon and Chloe Rollie for doing Scotland proud at last year's rugby world cup, Sammi Kinghorn for smashing record after record in wheelchair racing, Eryn Rae for being crowned Scotland's young traditional musician of the year, and Rachel Gardiner, a community learning disability nurse in the Borders, who was awarded the prestigious Queen's nurse title. Those are just some of the incredible women in the Borders I am proud to represent in the Parliament.

Having reflected on my colleague Roz McCall's speech, which I thought was excellent and thought provoking on this international women's day, I will close by saying that, despite women making up half the planet's population, many have no voice. We are the lucky ones, so let us not waste our voice but use it to help others. The right to speak is a wealth that we take for granted, so let us not waste it but help to redistribute it.

The Presiding Officer: I call Shona Robison to wind up the debate for the Government.

16:44

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): This debate has been a valuable and impactful way to mark international women's day this year. I thank members across the chamber for their powerful and thoughtful contributions, and I reflect on how we have come together as a Parliament to express the importance of our shared aim of advancing equality for women and girls, just as we unite to condemn sexism, misogyny and gender-based violence. At this

point, I will say that I am happy to accept both amendments.

Talking of women from other countries, I feel that it is particularly poignant to be marking international women's day this year, one year on from the start of the war in Ukraine. Over the past year, we have seen women forced to flee violence in Ukraine to make a home in a new land, often with their young children. I take this opportunity to express solidarity with the people of Ukraine and particularly with women and children, who we know suffer the impact of war severely. This morning, I got a message from the lady that I host, Margarita, who is from Dnipro, asking me whether we celebrate this day as they celebrate it in Ukraine, so it was lovely to be able to say that I might even give her a wee mention in the international women's day debate in the Parliament.

When Nicola Sturgeon and I entered the Parliament for the first time, in 1999, which was a few sleeps ago now, there were 48 MSPs who were women—37 per cent of the chamber. Notably, at that time, women made up 50 per cent of Scottish Labour MSPs and 43 per cent of SNP MSPs. At the time, that was called “a gender coup” and was compared with the high numbers of women who are in elected positions in Nordic countries. It was a dramatic change in the gender representation of elected politics in the UK, which had previously had a pretty dreadful record on women's representation. On 6 May 1999, more women were elected to the Scottish Parliament in one day than had been elected to represent Scotland in the House of Commons since 1918, when women were first allowed to stand to be an MP.

That did not happen by accident. There was a campaign by women's organisations, trade unions and civic society—and, indeed, across political parties—which came together because we wanted to see equal representation in our new Parliament. That is something that we must remember and continue. Now, women's representation is at 46 per cent, so there is still a bit of work to be done and we cannot be complacent about women's representation in politics or Parliament. We know that women still do not have equality in society and countries around the world, which is why debates such as today's remain vital.

I want to close this international women's day debate by mentioning the work of one particular woman: the First Minister herself, who, I think, might today have spoken in her last debate in that role. I want to thank members from across the chamber for their very personal tributes to her.

As well as recognising her many years of public service, we should also thank the First Minister for being a role model for women and girls in Scotland

and beyond. There have been many achievements in her time in office, and I want to mention just a few that are, I think, particularly important to women in Scotland.

It was, of course, this First Minister who, in 2017, set up the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls to champion gender equality, tackle inequality and the lack of representation and challenge gender stereotypes. At the United Nations 26th climate change conference of the parties—COP26—she led the Glasgow women's leadership statement on gender equality and climate change, which was jointly sponsored by the Scottish Government and UN Women. That committed to strengthening efforts to support women and girls addressing climate change. Further, of course, she helped to ensure that free period products were put in every school, college and university, building on the work that Monica Lennon has done and continues to do, and now it is common to see such products in many settings.

Monica Lennon: I thank the cabinet secretary for mentioning my favourite subject—I am very grateful. I want to do a wee shout-out for Hey Girls, whose representatives are out in the members' lobby, and I thank Paul McLennan for hosting them. Colleagues might be aware that Hey Girls has some period pants on display. I have been lobbying the UK Government about period pants, because they are still taxed as a luxury item, when we know that there is nothing luxury about periods. Therefore, I hope that the cabinet secretary and the rest of Parliament will join me in supporting Hey Girls, which is here with its reusable products, and in speaking with one voice to ask the UK Government to take VAT off our menstrual products.

Shona Robison: Absolutely. I pay tribute to the work of Hey Girls and join Monica Lennon in that important call.

There are too many initiatives to mention, but I will mention two further things that I think are important: the recognition of the importance of free childcare, which has been put firmly at the centre of the work that the Government has been doing; and tackling poverty and inequality. Nicola Sturgeon has made tackling child poverty a national mission, and a lot has flowed from that core commitment, including recognising that, if we can tackle women's poverty, we tackle child poverty by association. The work on the Scottish child payment and the five family benefits have been critical to that.

I guess that it is not easy holding the highest office in Scotland, which might be stating the bleeding obvious. Anyone who has held such a position will feel the pressure of that role. For a woman in that role, it is not easy to face the misogyny that it brings. Over that time, the rise in

social media has impacted on not only the First Minister but probably women across the chamber due to the misogyny and abuse that has become all too common.

It was great to hear in the First Minister's opening remarks about the work that is going on to introduce criminal offences to tackle misogyny, building on the fantastic work of Helena Kennedy. What a fitting legacy to Emma Ritch that the law clinic is named after her. That is a tremendous thing that we have heard about today, and I know that Emma Ritch's family will be delighted by that.

As women, we all have a role in doing so, but Nicola Sturgeon has led from the front in speaking about issues that, back in 1999, we would have perhaps found difficult to talk about. Words such as "miscarriage" or "menopause" were maybe whispered in the corridors of the Parliament but were not spoken openly in speeches about international women's day or other subjects, because we felt that they were taboo. The First Minister and the other women in the Parliament have led by making it absolutely normal to talk about the menopause and about miscarriage. Now, I hear women openly discussing issues that are deeply personal but which they feel can now be brought out into the open and discussed.

When she perhaps moves to other seats in the chamber, I know that the First Minister will continue to champion the equality and rights of women and girls. As the first female First Minister, and as one of the few women leaders in the world, she has shown that the glass ceiling can be shattered. There is the saying, "You can't be what you can't see"—well, girls across Scotland have seen that they can aspire to hold the highest office in our country, and that is a huge achievement.

I apologise that I have not got a singer's quote to give here.

Members: Aw!

Shona Robison: I know—I should have done better. However, I want to quote—*[Interruption.]* I want to quote Ann Richards, who was the governor of Texas and a strong feminist. She said about Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire—there is a dance in there—that she did everything that he did, but in high heels. I think that we can definitely say the same about our First Minister.

It has been a pleasure to take part in the debate, and the tone of the debate has shown the Parliament at its best. It has, once again, been led by women. Well done to everybody.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on international women's day 2023, #EmbraceEquity.

Business Motion

16:55

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-081050, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 14 March 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill - UK Legislation

followed by Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Debate: The Role of Local Government and its Cross-sectoral Partners in Financing and Delivering a Net-zero Scotland

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 March 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs and Islands;
Health and Social Care

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Delivering the Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture through the Agricultural Reform Route Map

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 March 2023

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

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice, Housing and Local

Government

followed by

Stage 1 Debate: Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill

followed by

Legislative Consent Motion:
Procurement Bill - UK Legislation

followed by

Legislative Consent Motion: Social Security (Additional Payments) (No. 2) Bill - UK Legislation

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

Tuesday 21 March 2023

2.00 pm

Time for Reflection

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by

Scottish Government Business

followed by

Committee Announcements

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Wednesday 22 March 2023

2.00 pm

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm

Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;
Justice and Veterans

followed by

Scottish Government Business

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Thursday 23 March 2023

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

2.30 pm

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

2.45 pm

Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by

Scottish Government Business

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 13 March 2023, in rule 13.7.3, after the

word “except” the words “to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or” are inserted.—[*George Adam*]

The Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Lumsden to speak to and move amendment S6M-08150.1.

16:55

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): My amendment seeks to insert ministerial statements into next week’s business. First, we are looking for a statement on the disastrous deposit return scheme. It is turning into complete farce. Most of the producers are not signed up to the scheme and the minister was unable to answer basic questions in this chamber yesterday. The Scottish National Party leadership hopefuls have cast doubt on the scheme and it is only right that the minister gives us an update.

Secondly, we want a statement on the ferry fiasco. At yesterday’s Finance and Public Administration Committee, the minister was unable to answer what the total cost of vessels 801 and 802 would be, and there are now fresh doubts about the timescales. Our island communities deserve better, and they deserve to be updated.

The final statement that we are looking for is on the funding U-turn for our Sistema Scotland projects across the country. Last Wednesday, I asked Neil Gray, who is the responsible minister, to step in and save Big Noise Torry. He said:

“This is an issue for our local authorities to determine; it is not for MSPs or Government ministers to intervene in local government decisions.”—[*Official Report*, 1 March 2023; c 7.]

Less than 48 hours later, the Government performed a screeching U-turn and announced funding for the two Big Noise projects that the SNP administrations had axed in Dundee and Aberdeen. That lifeline is, of course, welcome—[*Interruption.*]—but questions remain. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Lumsden.

Douglas Lumsden: As I said, questions remain, which is why we are looking for a ministerial statement to be added to the business programme. Those questions include: is that a one-year reprieve? Will the big noise projects that other local authorities are funding now be funded by this devolved Government instead? What changed following the minister’s response last week? Will the Government condemn the disgraceful comments that SNP councillors in Aberdeen made about Sistema Scotland?

When I was the co-leader of Aberdeen City Council, I had four budgets to set. Four times, council officers offered up big noise Torry as a potential saving, and, four times, I rejected that, because I knew the impact that the project has on those who are most vulnerable. Now, however, we have a shambles of an administration running Aberdeen City Council, which is led by SNP councillor Alex Nicoll, and that is, shamefully, propped up by the Liberal Democrats. They did not just defund the project; they verbally attacked Sistema Scotland with a disgusting attack on the good work that it does in a shameful attempt to discredit it.

Councillor Allard, who is a former member of this place, and someone who is meant to represent Torry—the very community that Sistema Scotland is supporting—said:

“Sistema had no impact on the people that needed help the most”.

He also said:

“Let’s be very clear, if we had the money, we wouldn’t do it either”.

The other SNP councillor for Torry, Councillor Fairfull, said:

“The council could not fund a project that has not deliver expected outcomes”.

What an absolute load of mince. The evidence reports are there for Councillors Nicoll, Allard, Fairfull and Yuill to read if they could be bothered to.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I understand that this is an amendment to a business motion, but I am hearing a speech about council matters. I seek your guidance as to whether this is relevant.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden is seeking a statement on those issues.

Douglas Lumsden: I have visited big noise Torry and I know the good work that it does. It deserves to be treated better than it is at present. The attack by local SNP councillors was shameful, resulting in the massive SNP spin machine rushing into overdrive and getting involved in a panic. No doubt that is because the SNP fears the impact that that betrayal would have on the fortunes of their SNP leader at Westminster, who is meant to represent Torry.

The response was predictable and pathetic in equal measure. Instead of the blame being put on the SNP councillors who wielded the axe, the blame is to be passed to the Tories at Westminster—it is absolutely pathetic. Budgets are about choices, and the councils in Dundee and

Aberdeen shamefully chose to axe Big Noise programmes. When the SNP-Liberal Democrat councillors are looking for someone to blame for libraries closing, swimming pools closing and Big Noise closing, they need to take some responsibility and have a look in the mirror. They alone are responsible for the choices and the cuts that they make.

Sistema changes the lives of our most vulnerable. It has a brilliant early intervention and prevention programme. I get it, and I am genuinely pleased that the minister agrees and has stepped in, but questions remain. A statement on Sistema funding will clear up these questions and allow the devolved Government to reaffirm its commitment to Sistema.

I move, as an amendment to motion S6M-08150 in the name of George Adam, to leave out

“2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice, Housing and Local Government”

and insert:

“2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

followed by Ministerial Statement: Children’s Orchestras Funding U-turn

followed by Ministerial Statement: Ferguson Marine and Ferry Services Update

followed by Ministerial Statement: Deposit Return Scheme Update”.

The Presiding Officer: I call Neil Bibby to speak to and move amendment S6M-08150.2.

17:00

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On behalf of Scottish Labour, I would like to pay tribute once again to our parliamentary staff for all their hard work in supporting us and ensuring the efficient running of Parliament. Their work is vital, and we cannot thank them enough.

We must also recognise the decision by members of the Public and Commercial Services Union in Parliament to take part in industrial action next Wednesday, as is their right, and we should all respect their decision to do so.

In the light of the industrial action, we propose to move parliamentary business next Wednesday. We would move the agriculture debate to Tuesday and portfolio questions to Thursday. We are also happy to support additional statements being included on Ferguson Marine, children’s orchestra funding and the deposit return scheme. That is all business that can easily be done next week on

alternative dates. The Welsh Senedd is moving its business, and we should do the same here.

The last time that Parliament sat during industrial action, the public gallery was closed. That was regrettable and should not have happened. It has not been confirmed yet by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether that will happen next Wednesday. If there is still the possibility of our having to meet without the public gallery being open—which there is—we should not plan to meet at all unless there is urgent or critical business.

Of course, we hope that the industrial dispute can be resolved as soon as possible. However, until then, we must recognise the importance of our staff to the safe and professional running of the Parliament and its business. Our staff are essential. Any other course of action here would send a message that they are not. Our staff support us; we should support them where we can.

I move amendment S6M-08150.2, to leave out from first

“followed by Committee Announcements”

to

“Tuesday 21 March 2023”

and insert:

“*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Delivering the Scottish Government’s Vision for Agriculture through the Agricultural Reform Route Map

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Thursday 16 March 2023

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

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice, Housing and Local Government;
Rural Affairs and Islands;
Health and Social Care

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill

followed by Legislative Consent Motion:
Procurement Bill - UK Legislation

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Social Security (Additional Payments) (No. 2) Bill - UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions
 followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.25 pm Decision Time
 followed by Members' Business"

The Presiding Officer: I call George Adam to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:02

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): We received the request from the Conservative Party late on Monday. I have committed to coming back to the bureau with a response, as per standard bureau process. I have heard more detail from Mr Lumsden now than I heard at bureau. As you will agree, Presiding Officer, the whole point of having the Parliamentary Bureau is to give us a place where we can have these discussions and make such points there and then.

None of that came from the Conservatives' business manager. He mentioned the statement, and I said that we would look into it. Nothing else was said with regard to that. Excuse me if I am slightly cynical about the political opportunism of the Conservatives in this situation.

On Mr Bibby's amendment regarding next week's PCS strike action, I, too, pay tribute to all the Scottish Parliament staff and the work that they do to make our work better. However, as we discussed at bureau, Parliament will be sitting as normal at that time, subject to the corporate body agreeing to that in its meeting tomorrow.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-08150.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend business motion S6M-08150, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:04

Meeting suspended.

17:06

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-08150.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend business motion S6M-08150, in the name of George Adam, on

behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 56, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-08150.2, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend business motion S6M-08150, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, 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)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)

Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 22, Against 94, Abstentions 5.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08150, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau,

setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)	Tuesday 14 March 2023	
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)	2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill - UK Legislation
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Debate: The Role of Local Government and its Cross-sectoral Partners in Financing and Delivering a Net-zero Scotland
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)	<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)	5.00 pm	Decision Time
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)	Wednesday 15 March 2023	
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs and Islands; Health and Social Care
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Delivering the Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture through the Agricultural Reform Route Map
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)	<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)	5.00 pm	Decision Time
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	Wednesday 15 March 2023	
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)	2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)	2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs and Islands; Health and Social Care
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Delivering the Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture through the Agricultural Reform Route Map
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)	5.00 pm	Decision Time
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)	<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)	Thursday 16 March 2023	
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)	11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)	11.40 am	General Questions
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)	12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)	<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)	2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Against	2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice, Housing and Local Government
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Stage 1 Debate: Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Legislative Consent Motion: Procurement Bill - UK Legislation
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Legislative Consent Motion: Social Security (Additional Payments) (No. 2) Bill - UK Legislation
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)	5.00 pm	Decision Time
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Abstentions	<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)	5.00 pm	Decision Time
The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 97, Against 22, Abstentions 1.	Tuesday 21 March 2023	
<i>Motion agreed to,</i>		
That the Parliament agrees—		
(a) the following programme of business—		

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

Wednesday 22 March 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Constitution, External Affairs and
 Culture;
 Justice and Veterans
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 March 2023

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
 2.30 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body
 Questions
 2.45 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Education and Skills
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 13 March 2023, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-08151, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable for a bill. I invite George Adam to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 30 June 2023.—[*George Adam*]

The Presiding Officer: I call Paul O'Kane to speak to and move amendment S6M-08151.1.

17:12

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): This week, we have heard much about the proposed National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, not in the chamber but in the newspapers and, of course, on our televisions, including during last night's unedifying—I think that that is putting it mildly—SNP leadership debate.

Indeed, positions on the bill have been shifting more quickly than the bureau and the Parliament can keep up with. Last night, the national care service was discussed—sorry, rammied over—by the candidates. It has been clear since the start of the leadership campaign that all the candidates are now articulating different forms of a pause to the bill. [*Interruption.*] I am pleased that the SNP leadership candidates have now accepted what Scottish Labour, trade unions, professional bodies and local government have been arguing for months, but it is becoming—

The Presiding Officer: Mr O'Kane, just give me a moment. I am aware that several conversations are taking place across the chamber. I would be grateful if those could wait until members leave the chamber.

Paul O'Kane: I know that SNP back benchers will be comparing the performances of their respective candidates last night.

Clearly, there is no unity in the Government on the way forward with the bill. In a matter of weeks, we have shifted from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and other senior ministers defending the bill to the hilt to the cabinet secretary now admitting that the bill, in its current form, needs to be paused and overhauled.

The Government's motion suggests that the timetable for completion of stage 1 should be moved to June, but the Government has failed to explain why June is the most suitable time. Is it because it is politically expedient for the Government to move stage 1 until after the SNP leadership election, once the candidates have finished ripping one another to shreds and the Government has cobbled together a common position?

Presiding Officer,

"How much longer do people who need adult social care need to wait until we've got a system that isn't being called into disrepute by the trade unions, local government and four parliamentary committees?"

Those are not my words; they are the words of Kate Forbes from last night's debate, when she was eviscerating Humza Yousaf's record as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. It

appears that she and I agree on something, because she is right.

If the Government is serious about re-engaging with stakeholders, bringing people back around the table and building confidence in its national care service proposals, the stage 1 process cannot be moved down the tracks to a more suitable time for the SNP with no action in between to re-engage those stakeholders. It must be paused until at least the later part of the year to give sufficient time for the bill to be redrafted and brought back to the Parliament by a new health secretary for scrutiny. Indeed, that is exactly the position that the current health secretary is advocating since his Damascene conversion to supporting a pause to the bill.

How can the bill proceed on a June timetable when the Government is in such a state of disarray? Last night, it was made abundantly clear for all the public to see that Humza Yousaf's own Cabinet colleagues do not have faith in his ability to serve as health secretary. Kate Forbes said the quiet part out loud when she less than discreetly admitted that she would sack him as health secretary if she became First Minister.

We need a proper pause to the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill to allow an opportunity for stakeholders to get back round the table and to make it right. Moving stage 1 until June does not allow sufficient time for that vital work to be undertaken. In the context of the Government being in a state of total disarray with Cabinet colleagues publicly arguing and contradicting one another, we need a proper pause until at least November to ensure that we have a proposal for a national care service that is fit for purpose and has the confidence of key stakeholders. That is what we, on the Labour benches, have argued for consistently. It is time that the Government got a grip and got on with redrafting the bill.

I move amendment S6M-08151.1, to leave out "30 June 2023" and insert:

"1 November 2023".

17:16

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Paul O'Kane for his amendment.

Finally, the SNP has come to the same realisation as the unions, local authorities, its own back benchers and the public. It is the realisation to which committees of the Parliament came: that the national care service plans are unaffordable, unworkable and a massive distraction from the crisis in care that the SNP has created across Scotland.

Even the cabinet secretary responsible for the bill, Humza Yousaf, is beating a hasty retreat from

his own policy. He is not alone, of course, because the SNP's leadership candidates are undermining the policy and throwing it overboard as they seek to abandon Nicola Sturgeon's legacy in their desperate bid to captain the SNP's sinking ship.

Perhaps the only person in Scotland who still believes that there will be a national care service is Kevin Stewart. The minister believes that, so long as the music is playing, he will get up and dance. The only problem is that, on the national care service, the minister is still dancing but the music has stopped.

The decision today should be about whether we ditch or delay the bill. The national care service policy is clearly wrong for Scotland and is in disarray. Only last night, we saw the fissures laid bare as two ministers and one former minister trashed policies from the manifesto upon which they were elected.

It is no surprise that the Government is now seeking to delay the bill, but to try to hide from the Parliament why it is doing so is an outrage. The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care must come before Parliament and explain to members their concerns about the bill and their climb-down.

The vote still will not go far enough. The Parliament should be voting to scrap the SNP's failing social care plans because social care in Scotland is in crisis and the last thing that carers, staff and patients need is a major bureaucratic overhaul of the system that would divert precious resources away from the front line and into employing hundreds more management and administrative staff. The SNP must listen to those voices, abandon the plans and put every penny into front-line care.

In the absence of a total withdrawal of the plan, we support the longer delay proposed by Labour. However, the delay, whether to June or November, will inevitably be only a precursor to the bill being scrapped once the SNP's divisive leadership election comes to a close. We simply cannot afford to see £1.3 billion diverted away from front-line local services when the sector is crying out for help.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Hoy, can I stop you there?

I am deeply frustrated. A number of conversations are carrying on while a member is addressing the Parliament. Can we please treat members who are speaking with the respect to which they should be entitled?

Craig Hoy: They do not want to hear about the division within their own ranks, Presiding Officer.

The Government must come to this Parliament, make its position clear and allow members to ask the questions that councils, carers, the third sector and those who rely on care and those who live in care now want answered.

The national care service plan should be ditched—it should not just be delayed.

The Presiding Officer: I call George Adam to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:20

George Adam: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Well, that was a very interesting 10 minutes—none of it anything whatsoever to do with reality. I will bring everybody else on the Opposition benches back into the real world with us. The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to delivering plans for a national care service—[*Interruption.*] Change of this scale—

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the minister.

George Adam: —is necessary to deliver the consistency and quality of care and support that the people of Scotland deserve, making Scotland a fairer and more equal place to live in.

Extending the stage 1 deadline—this is the reality of the situation—for the bill is necessary due to rightly complex and extensive scrutiny by several committees. Doing so will allow the lead committee more time to work on its stage 1 report while ensuring that the Government can comprehensively consider the report and its response to it.

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee agreed with that rationale for the extension and is content with the revised deadline of Friday, 30 June 2023.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-08151.1, in the name of Paul O’Kane, which seeks to amend business motion S6M-08151, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 1 timetable for a bill, 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that business motion S6M-08151, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 1 timetable for a bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 30 June 2023.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-08152, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 2 timetable for a bill. Any member who wishes to speak against the motion should press their request-to-speak button now. I call George Adam to move the motion.

17:23

George Adam: I am busy today, Presiding Officer.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 24 March 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-08153, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I call George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Amendment of Expiry Dates and Rent Cap Modification) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.—[*George Adam*]

17:24

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. Before my comments, I remind members of my entry in the register of interests, which shows that I own rental properties in Moray.

Six months ago, the Government rushed through legislation, without consultation, to freeze rents and continue an eviction ban across Scotland. Although the policy appeared to be well intentioned, the Scottish Conservatives repeatedly warned the minister that it would have damaging consequences for the housing sector. Those warnings fell on deaf ears. The minister appeared to know better, but clearly he did not.

Since the legislation was passed, plans to build 11,000 new affordable homes in Glasgow have been paused—£1 billion-worth of investment has been halted. House builders and landlords have lost confidence in the Government, and to prove it the Scottish Association of Landlords has launched a judicial review of the emergency legislation. If the Scottish Government loses the case, it could be liable for compensating all who are affected. I am not sure whether the minister has even considered that.

However, the minister now wants Parliament to extend the provisions of the legislation for six months, which will allow a 3 per cent rent increase in the private sector and an unregulated rise in the social sector. The big question for most people is about how the Government came up with the figure of 3 per cent. Was it based on evidence, or was the figure plucked from thin air? I believe that the minister needs to justify it by sharing his workings, because to me it looks no better than a guesstimate.

I believe that a rent cap will impede many landlords from having the capital to make what are increasingly expensive updates to their properties, many of which are mandated by legislation. In the long term, it does not make sense to renovate a private rental property when the landlord will only

ever make the basic minimum or have to remove it from the rental market. Scotland's rental sector cannot be allowed to shrink.

The Government damages the private sector at its peril, I believe. The sector provides 340,000 homes, but that number is falling, and it will fall even further if the Government continues to penalise landlords. I remind Parliament that I believe that we need every single one of those houses. A drop in the supply of homes will, after all, hurt tenants most.

I believe that the SSI will penalise private rental landlords and that, in the long term, it will hurt tenants. I call on members to oppose the SSI; it is based on a guesstimate.

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

Edward Mountain: I am in my last minute, but I will give way if I have time.

The Presiding Officer: The member should conclude.

Edward Mountain: I am sorry—I would have taken Mr Mason's intervention if I had had time.

The SSI is bad for landlords and bad for tenants, and it is contributing to the collapse in the number of existing rental properties and preventing new ones from being built. Frankly, I believe that it is bad news for us all.

17:27

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): As the whole Parliament is well aware, we introduced the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 to do three things: to protect tenants through stabilising their housing costs by freezing rents; to reduce the impact of eviction and homelessness through introduction of a moratorium on enforcement of evictions; and to avoid evictions from the rented sector by landlords wanting to raise rents between tenancies during the temporary measures, and reduce unlawful evictions.

Since then, the 2022 act has provided important additional protection for tenants across the rented sector, as we continue to live through challenging and uncertain economic times. Our updated data and economic analysis—which we published at the start of this year—shows that the unprecedented economic position has not yet fundamentally changed, and that many households in the private rented sector, in particular, continue to struggle.

It is for that reason that the regulations that are before the Parliament today seek to extend the rent cap measures for the private rented sector,

and the eviction moratorium provisions, across all rented sectors that are covered by the 2022 act, and to extend other important provisions in the act for a further six-month period to 30 September.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I remind Parliament of my interest as the owner of a private rented property in North Lanarkshire. We agree that it is right to extend the provisions, given the crisis in household finances, but how many times will we extend them in a piecemeal fashion? Would not it be better to bring forward the proposed housing bill and to have a permanent state of rent controls in this country instead of relying on continued extension of the provisions?

Patrick Harvie: As Mark Griffin knows, the necessity and proportionality of the emergency measures needs to be continually reassessed in the light of events. That is why the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Bill, which was supported by the Labour Party, was structured as it was. However, we have committed to introducing the new housing bill as soon as possible after the summer recess this year.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I need to move on.

We recognise the on-going impacts of the cost crisis, which may also be impacting on some private landlords. That is why the regulations propose that the rent cap be varied to allow for within-tenancy rent increases of up to 3 per cent.

Mercedes Villalba: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Patrick Harvie: I will, if I can have some extra time.

The Presiding Officer: I can give you a little time back, but you have only half a minute of your time left.

Patrick Harvie: In that case, I need to move on quickly.

That approach gives a measure of parity in monetary terms, in line with the voluntary rent-setting agreement that is in place with social sector landlords, while continuing to protect tenants from unaffordable rent increases.

There is also a safeguard in place for landlords who could alternatively opt to apply to rent service Scotland for a rent increase of up to 6 per cent, if they have had an increase in their defined prescribed property costs within a specified period.

I draw to Mr Mountain's attention that it is important to recognise that, as well as being time limited and kept under review, the emergency

legislation does not affect initial rent setting; it affects only in-tenancy rent increases.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, minister.

Patrick Harvie: In summary, for many years, Scotland has led the way on housing issues, including through the abolition of the right to buy, the provision of security of tenure for tenants and the provision of new social housing. Through the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022, it continues to show such leadership. I am proud of that work—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. You must conclude.

Patrick Harvie: —and I ask Parliament to approve the necessary and important measures that are before it today.

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

Decision Time

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-08137.2, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08137, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on international women's day 2023, #EmbraceEquity, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-08137.1, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08137, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on international women's day 2023, #EmbraceEquity, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that S6M-08137, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on international women's day 2023, #EmbraceEquity, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the 2023 International Women's Day theme of #EmbraceEquity, which recognises that each person has different circumstances, and that there is a need to focus resource and opportunity where it is most needed to reach an equal outcome; recognises that it is the responsibility of everyone to end the discrimination that women and girls face; acknowledges that, while much progress towards achieving equity has been made, there is more to do in Scotland and around the world to achieve and maintain equity; expresses disappointment in the backsliding of women's rights across the world in the past year, and particularly in Iran and Afghanistan; welcomes the independent Stewart review into increasing women's participation in entrepreneurship; recognises and takes up the challenges given by the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls to address systemic inequality; further recognises that cultural shifts are needed alongside legislation; recognises the tireless work of organisations and communities across Scotland to promote equity and support all women; agrees that equity is necessary for society and the economy to thrive, and that everyone should work together to embrace equity on, and beyond, International Women's Day; believes that using Scottish choices to implement split payments for Universal Credit is key to this, and calls on the Scottish Government to provide an update on progress made on this within this calendar year.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-08153, in the name of George Adam, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app froze. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)

Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08153, in the name of George Adam, is: For 87, Against 31, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Amendment of

Expiry Dates and Rent Cap Modification) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Save Loch Lomond

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so as quickly and quietly as possible.

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S6M-08046, in the name of Ross Greer, on save Loch Lomond. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I encourage members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button as soon as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the popularity of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park as a result of the area's world famous natural landscape and wildlife; considers that, while this popularity brings economic benefits to local communities, it also results in challenges such as traffic and parking congestion, antisocial behaviour and disruption for residents; believes that Flamingo Land's recently revised plans for a massive tourist development at Balloch, including 104 lodges, two hotels, a water park and 372 parking spaces, would significantly worsen these problems, while providing insufficient benefit to the local economy; notes the work undertaken by Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, VisitScotland and other stakeholders to encourage green tourism; considers that there is still much more to be done to achieve the collective aspiration for a more sustainable and respectful use of the park by visitors, and notes the calls on Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park to recognise what it sees as the overwhelming view of the local community, shared by the National Trust, Woodland Trust, Ramblers Scotland and others, and reject what it considers Flamingo Land's latest unwelcome application.

17:36

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): At the outset, I apologise to the local residents in Balloch, who I know are watching on Scottish Parliament TV, for how long this has taken. I hope that it is worth the wait for them.

I also thank Green and Scottish National Party colleagues who supported the motion and enabled this evening's debate. I am particularly grateful for that, given that I last raised the issue via a members' business debate just nine months ago. However, there have been some major developments in the saga since that point, most notably a major revision to Flamingo Land's application, which I will come to in a moment.

First, though, I hope that colleagues will indulge me in providing a brief history of how the past seven years have led us to this point. It has, indeed, been a seven-year process, and I highlight that number to emphasise just how exhausting it has been for the local community, which has now had this threat hanging over it for the best part of a decade.

Flamingo Land's first formal application was lodged and dealt with four years ago. The application was for a tourist resort on a massive scale, sitting on the banks of Loch Lomond at Balloch, on what is currently largely publicly owned land. The plans included 125 woodland lodges, to be situated largely in the ancient woodland at Drumkinnon wood, as well as a hotel, a water park, a monorail and more. Iconic lochside views were to be interrupted by buildings that local residents quite fairly described as "garish", and publicly owned land was to be used to generate profits for a private company that is based hundreds of miles away, in Yorkshire, which certainly would not be reinvesting them in the local community and economy.

Flamingo Land's own environmental impact assessment made for particularly grim reading. It spoke of, among other things, damage to ancient woodland, pollution of standing and running water, red squirrel and otter fatalities and a host of other environmental concerns. That was from Flamingo Land's own documentation.

As members might recall, local residents and I formed the save Loch Lomond campaign, through which we lodged more than 60,000 objections. That made the Flamingo Land application the most unpopular planning application in Scottish history. We were joined in objecting by the Woodland Trust, Ramblers Scotland and West Dunbartonshire Council.

The application was so clearly contrary to local and national planning policy that the national park's own planning officers recommended that their board reject it. Rather than face that loss, Flamingo Land withdrew its application with just days to go before the hearing. That was in 2019.

We knew that it would come back, so it was no surprise that a fresh application was lodged last year. That application was for 127 lodges, two hotels, a water park, a monorail, up to 21 apartments, a brewery, a pub, a restaurant and a boathouse, all to be served by 393 parking spaces. Flamingo Land tried to squeeze almost as much in as it did the first time, but into a smaller space. The company told us that the ancient woodland at Drumkinnon wood had been taken out of the application and lodges moved elsewhere on the site. However, any suspicions that Flamingo Land had turned into tree huggers thanks to our influence were short lived.

The details of the plans still show that an area of Drumkinnon wood, marked in the application as area 10, is earmarked for destruction, as are sections of ancient woodland alongside Woodbank house and the proposed boathouse. Moreover, even the supposedly saved bulk of Drumkinnon wood might be endangered by the plans. The wood is currently under the ownership of Scottish

Enterprise—a public body—but, should planning permission be granted for the site, Flamingo Land would get the wood, too. When Flamingo Land was still speaking to me—that was some time ago—it told me that the economic viability of the site rested on being able to develop in the ancient woodland. Should Flamingo Land take ownership of the woods or even have a long-term lease, it is hard to believe that it would not seek, at some point, to exploit them for financial benefit.

Last year's plans were seriously flawed, left many questions unanswered and included a number of contradictory claims. Therefore, on my behalf, the planning and environmental law expert Ian Cowan submitted a detailed letter of objection, flagging every one of the issues to the national park. In response, the park's planning department, in essence, put the process on hold—for which I am grateful—and demanded that the developer resubmit a number of documents and respond to 16 requests on everything from clarification on contradictory statements on parking provision and ancient woodland loss to how the proposals could possibly meet the high bar that is set by national planning framework 4.

Just two weeks ago, Flamingo Land responded, so this is a timely debate. It has reduced the number of lodges planned to 104 and the number of parking spaces planned to 372 in order to allow the staff and service area to be relocated from area 10—the bit of ancient woodland. That is welcome, and I congratulate the local residents who worked hard to protect that part of Drumkinnon wood. However, the ancient woodland is not safe from a sell-off, and, as is described in the Woodland Trust's briefing, which was circulated to MSPs, other sections of ancient woodland are still under threat.

There are so many flaws in the third attempt at a proposal. The development would still be much bigger than the visitor experience space that is zoned in the national park's planning policy, and it would be a scar on a world-famous landscape. The landscape and visual impact assessment admits that there would be adverse effects.

Flamingo Land keeps telling us that there would be no negative impact on access, but that would be simply impossible to achieve. A popular public space for informal recreation cannot be turned into a densely packed, branded and privately owned holiday lodge park without a loss of freedom to roam.

A busy attraction with 372 parking spaces certainly is not compatible with the park's net zero objectives or the Scottish Government's policy of reducing car use. We are all too well aware that Loch Lomond and its communities are overwhelmed by visitors travelling by car through peak tourist season. We can speak to any resident

of Luss, Balmaha or Balloch about the stress of dealing with everything from inconsiderate parking to genuinely dangerous driving and antisocial behaviour.

We want people to enjoy Loch Lomond, but we must acknowledge that some of its communities are simply at breaking point. The last thing that any of us want is the kind of oversaturation of tourism, leading to deep-seated hostility from residents, that destinations such as Barcelona have experienced.

The park is doing excellent work to make visiting the area more sustainable and to support local residents who are struggling with the impact of high visitor numbers. I know that the minister will not be able to say much about a live planning application, and I recognise that this issue is not under his portfolio, but I would appreciate it if he could speak a little more about the good work that the park is doing to encourage sustainable use.

There is one other issue relating to the park authority that I encourage the minister and his colleague Lorna Slater to look into. When there is a controversial planning application, objectors are normally able to contact their councillors directly and make their views heard. Even though councillors on the relevant committee—the planning committee—would not be allowed to express an opinion on the plans, feedback from residents is an important part of the process, so it is unfortunate that Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park is the exception. Unlike any of the more than 500 other councils and national parks in the United Kingdom, that park does not publicise direct contact details for its board members. I know that many of my constituents want to address board members directly, and the fact that they have no means of doing so leaves an unacceptable democratic deficit.

The views of the community in this case are certainly beyond doubt. There have now been two local surveys, which have shown that there is opposition by a margin of about three to one. Flamingo Land's chief executive said that, if the community did not support the plan, it would walk away. It is very clear that the community does not support the plan, but here we are again.

Residents certainly do not trust Flamingo Land's grand claims. Not only would the substantial increase in traffic on already busy local roads clearly be to the detriment of the community, there is very little belief that the claimed economic benefits would actually materialise. Flamingo Land initially promised that there would be 300 new jobs for the area, but that number has plummeted as the years have gone on. The eventual impact assessment for the 2019 application stated that the equivalent of just 28 net jobs would be created

in the region in comparison with what would happen if Flamingo Land's plan did not go ahead, and many of those jobs would, of course, be seasonal.

The community is not hostile to development. I would certainly welcome the redevelopment of Woodbank house, for example. However, Flamingo Land's plans are too big and destructive and come from a developer whose behaviour should, frankly, disqualify it from playing a role in the life of our national park.

The community is not short of alternative ideas for some of the sites, but those cannot be taken forward as long as Flamingo Land's exclusivity agreement is in place. Were that to be dropped, Scottish Enterprise would get a lot out of speaking to residents about what they want. In some cases, such as in Drumkinnon wood, that would be for no development to take place. Much-loved, well-used community green spaces are worth protecting, especially when they are also the gateway to our world-famous national park.

Some 43,000 objections have been lodged to the latest application. The Woodland Trust and Ramblers Scotland have joined us in opposing it once again, and the National Trust for Scotland has now also come out against the plans. We are all motivated by a deep love for Loch Lomond and a passionate desire to protect it. We have beaten Flamingo Land at every turn for seven years now, and we are ready to do so one last time. We are going to save Loch Lomond.

17:45

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I thank Ross Greer for once again bringing this issue to the attention of the Parliament. As the MSP who is lucky enough to have Loch Leven on my doorstep, I know only too well the strength of feeling that I and many of my constituents have for these iconic beauty spots. There, my work involves supporting those who are attempting to deliver long-term solutions to the local community so that they can continue to enjoy the loch and see the ecology restored.

However, today's topic concentrates on Loch Lomond, one of Scotland's two national parks. It is a place that has an emotional meaning for generations of Scots and visitors to our country. Its bonnie, bonnie banks mark it as a place of worldwide wonder.

It is 20 years since Scotland's first national parks were established—in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and in the Cairngorms. In that time, the parks have responsibly faced up to biodiversity and climate crisis issues, managing facilities for visitors, promoting responsible access to the land and assisting in developing sustainable

communities. So, it is clear that those who are entrusted with protecting our national treasures know what they are doing.

All those who have been to Loch Lomond and have witnessed its charms could easily understand why a big business or developer would want to take advantage of the site and capitalise on the popularity of this national treasure, which welcomes millions of visitors each year. It is right that we sit in this Parliament to debate this topic, given that it is a site of huge significance to so many people. Ultimately, however, we are also correct to accept that this is a decision that is best taken locally by those whose lives will be impacted more than those of Government ministers or MSPs, who would visit the loch and its surrounding beauty spots. The decision will be taken by the park authority board, which includes elected community representatives and local community councillors, and it is those people we should trust to fully understand and appreciate the issue.

In order to maintain its prestige, the national park does impressive work each year, working closely with communities, land managers, local businesses, the third sector and individuals who aim to support biodiversity and improve the health and wellbeing of the local community. The current Lomond Banks plan is in the planning process, and I fully agree that the park authority will closely assess whether the development would have an impact on the environment and the local community. Furthermore, those making the decision will consider whether it complies with the Scottish planning policy, national planning framework 4, which Scotland adopted in February and which has become a statutory part of the national park development plan. NPF4 will guide Scotland's net zero spatial planning journey over the next decade, with the aim of delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places. It is clear that, if the proposers are to be successful, their application must meet the spirit of NPF4 and the needs of the national park and its local communities.

The previous Flamingo Land application was withdrawn as a result of dialogue between the developer, the park authority and the local community in Balloch and south of Loch Lomond. I hope that today's debate in the Scottish Parliament will reassure the public and all those with an interest in, or a bond with, the park that any development will occur only after serious consideration by the rightful decision makers on the ground that it strictly complies with NPF4 and the park authority's serious considerations. I, for one, will follow the project with interest.

17:48

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): As a West of Scotland MSP, I am honoured to have part of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park in my region. Last year, Ross Greer secured debating time to explore the live planning application for the Lomond Banks development. I felt then that it was important to remain neutral. He has now brought the issue to the Parliament yet again while the planning application is still live. I therefore hope that all contributions to the debate are respectful of the fact that due process is still to be played out.

When I spoke in last year's debate on Lomond Banks, I made the point that such developments can often have a positive outcome for the local community, but only when the local community is allowed their full say on the project. With that in mind, I am pleased that the Lomond Banks team has been working constructively to address the residents' concerns. That work is reflected clearly in the revised application that was recently submitted to the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. Important revisions include those relating to the environment and local infrastructure, which Ross Greer has drawn attention to in his motion.

In my contribution last year, I also outlined concerns about antisocial behaviour and littering. I welcome the fact that, in its legally binding Lomond promise document, the developer has committed to deploying monitoring systems and to employing suitably qualified staff to manage any antisocial behaviour within the development and its immediate surroundings. However, further clarity on littering and waste management would be welcome.

Another outstanding issue is that of the natural environment. I welcome the significant reduction in accommodation density in the revised plans, as well as the move to ensure that there is no reduction in the area's input to biodiversity value. However, as the Woodland Trust has highlighted, certain areas of ancient woodland remain at risk even under the revised plans.

I also welcome the promises to work with local businesses and community councils to ensure that the local community sees the potential economic and social benefits of the project. The social value portal that Lomond Banks has proposed would be a key part of measuring any potential benefits, but, despite further assurances from the developer, concerns around local infrastructure such as roads remain a pressing issue for residents. The staggered check-in and check-out times that Lomond Banks has proposed as a solution to that is promising, but we will not know how effective that system is until the development goes ahead.

As I remarked in the previous debate on the subject, I am not opposed to such developments by default, but it is vital that the concerns of communities are fully heard. Efforts to liaise with stakeholders are welcome, but they cannot be one-off actions. There will have to be a continued process of going back and forth to create a balance, and it is likely that further concessions will have to be made. Although much work is still to be done, I remain hopeful that, through constructive engagement, a system can be developed whereby any development complements the local area, rather than detracting from it.

17:53

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Ross Greer on securing the debate, as it gives me an opportunity to speak about the constituency that I am proud to represent. Loch Lomond is a most beautiful place, with some of the most breathtaking views in all of Scotland. It is because it is so special to my local community and to visitors from across Scotland, the UK and the world that any development must be carefully considered and properly scrutinised.

Members will be aware that Lomond Banks, otherwise known as Flamingo Land, wants to develop a tourism project at Loch Lomond. It will be a multisite development centred at West Riverside in Balloch. Incidentally, the land is owned by Scottish Enterprise, so the Government has an interest. The development will include self-catering lodges, hotels and other accommodation. As Ross Greer outlined, Lomond Banks's first planning application was withdrawn. The second application, which has recently been revised again, has taken on board some of the feedback that was given clearly by the local community.

I will reflect on some of that feedback. I conducted a survey of Balloch and the surrounding area. There was a 12 per cent return rate from the several thousand survey forms that were issued. Thirty-one per cent of respondents were in favour of the development and 68 per cent were against; in 1 per cent of responses, it was unclear whether or not the respondents were in favour. A further survey was conducted by the local community council in which the number of respondents who were against was even greater than I identified.

However, of most interest to me, having analysed the responses, was the point that people in my area had similar concerns and made similar observations whether they agreed or disagreed with the development. They did not want development at Drumkinnon wood. The briefing from the Woodland Trust, which has already been quoted, notes that the resubmitted documents are

an improvement in terms of the impact on ancient woodland but, as Ross Greer pointed out, concerns remain and need to be addressed.

People in my community also wanted to be sure that the impact on the economy would be positive: there should be good jobs that pay at least the Scottish living wage, there should not be casual contracts, and local businesses should benefit as part of the supply chain. There has been positive work by Lomond Banks to address those concerns. I recognise the pledges that the company has made to the local community—I would expect nothing less—but my local community also wanted better infrastructure and the roads to be dealt with, and I have to say that there has been little movement on that point.

In the summer—indeed, at any point when the sun comes out—there is regularly gridlock on the A82 at Stoneymollan roundabout. As people head to Loch Lomond, that becomes worse past the roundabout. Traffic on the A811 is also affected. It does not take much traffic for the road to grind to a halt. Adding extra vehicle movements and visitors from a development of the size proposed will have an impact.

The developers say that the impact will be minimal. They say that they will encourage active travel and will provide incentives to use the local rail services. That all sounds really good, but if I go on a self-catering holiday, I will take my car filled with what I need for the week or the weekend. The reality is that that encouragement might be helpful when people get on site, but their movements on and off site will have an impact. Local knowledge matters at times such as this—people need to be clear about that.

I will be very clear, for the avoidance of doubt. If the application is to pass, the roads infrastructure needs to be addressed. Otherwise, to be frank, the application should not proceed. That is an absolute red line for me, because the local community has borne enough with the existing roads infrastructure.

Given the controversy generated by the application, it is likely to end up with ministers, whatever the national park authority's decision. I am conscious that Lorna Slater is the minister with responsibility for national parks, but I believe that the application would be a matter for the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth. Will the Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise confirm that my understanding is correct?

I am not sure whether the Bute house agreement will still be in place by the point at which the application ends up with ministers—who knows?—but it is clear that local people cannot be expected just to put up with more traffic on already

difficult roads. The developer needs to work with Transport Scotland and West Dunbartonshire Council to prevent further traffic misery from being piled on to local people. If that does not happen, the application should not succeed.

17:58

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): I am happy to have the opportunity to close this debate on Ross Greer's motion. I thank him for bringing the motion to the chamber, and I thank all the members who have taken the opportunity to make their valid points on the record.

Members will recognise, as the Minister for Parliamentary Business did when the subject was last debated, in June last year, that it will be difficult for me to comment much because the planning application for Lomond Banks is still live and the Scottish ministerial code rightly restricts ministers from commenting publicly on live planning applications, as doing so could prejudice the final decision. Therefore, unfortunately, I will be unable to take interventions.

Applications for planning permission are dealt with by the relevant planning authority in the first instance. In this case, that is the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. Planning decisions within the national park are required to have regard to the national park plan and must be in accordance with the national planning framework 4, along with the national park's local development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. That recognition of and respect for the important role played by the planning authorities in making decisions on future developments in their area mean that it is rare for ministers to intervene in a live planning application, and they will do so only where matters of national interest are at stake. In response to Jackie Baillie's point, I confirm that, as I understand it, the planning minister would be the relevant minister in such cases.

I acknowledge members' interest in the project and in the wider running of our national parks. The Scottish Government, too, is a strong supporter of the work that our national parks do, from conserving and protecting Scotland's nature and biodiversity to making the parks a great place to visit and to live and work in. Both the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park and the Cairngorms national park continue to go from strength to strength in preserving Scotland's unique nature while also supporting local communities, businesses and visitors. Indeed, in recognition of their value in that respect and their potential to help to address the twin climate and biodiversity crises that Scotland faces, the Scottish Government has committed to the designation of a

new national park by the end of this parliamentary session.

I am sure that members are aware that our national parks have a number of duties and driving objectives, including supporting their tourism economy. However, their underpinning aim, which takes precedence in any decision making, is to conserve and enhance Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. I am confident that the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park will apply that aim to its assessment of the Lomond Banks project. Indeed, having that kind of rigorous scrutiny process is one of the reasons why these decisions can take so long.

I should also point out that that process is transparent, with information on the application published on the park's website. The opportunity is there for anyone to submit formal comments on the application. Ultimately, any decisions are transparent and will be made in line with the park's four aims of conserving and enhancing natural cultural heritage; promoting the sustainable use of natural resources in the area; promoting understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities to the public; and promoting sustainable social and economic development of the area's communities. As I have said, where there are potential conflicts, the first of those aims will be considered above all others.

Listening to the views that have been expressed, I can tell that there is a lot of passion around this project. The park has indicated that updated information has been received at the request of the authority and there is currently an opportunity for further comment to be made. The most appropriate and impactful way in which members can make their views known is to feed in to the process formally by submitting formal comments directly to the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority through the official planning portal on its website, by emailing it directly or by sending a written letter to its headquarters. As the process is transparent, any correspondence is published on the portal, alongside the application.

I take on board Ross Greer's comment about the issue of contacting board members, and I can inform him that board members can be contacted through the board's email address. As for his other point on this matter, my understanding is that, with regard to email addresses, board members are not subject to the same provisions as exist in local government legislation.

Comments in the form of formal representations can be submitted until 30 March, although public comments can continue to be submitted after that date until a short time before the park authority's members meet to determine the application. However, it is advisable that comments be

submitted by that date to ensure that feedback is submitted within the statutory timeframe. That will help to ensure that the park authority is able to consider all information and representations as quickly as possible and in advance of its meeting to determine the application.

Once again, I thank members for their thoughts on the project, and I am grateful for the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Government.

Meeting closed at 18:03.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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