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Tuesday 28 March 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 28 March 2023

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Right Rev Dr Iain Greenshields, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

The Right Rev Dr Iain Greenshields (Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland): Good afternoon. First of all, I bring to you the very best wishes of the Church of Scotland, and assure Parliament that, the length and breadth of this nation, our churches are praying for Parliament on a regular basis.

Luke, chapter 10, says:

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’

Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

Good leadership, rooted in service for others, is essential for the good of any society.

The short passage that I read is an interaction between Jesus and a Jewish religious leader, where Jesus, in response to the question, “Who is my neighbour?”, tells the familiar story that we know as the Good Samaritan. Much has been made of that wonderful responsive story by Jesus, but often we forget that those concluding remarks between Jesus and his contemporary are fundamental.

The heart of the story is that the one who showed mercy reflected the quality of love that is expected by Jesus. In the ancient Hebrew language, the word for mercy speaks of the unconditional love that a parent has for their child. It is therefore a powerful and primal concept.

Indeed, mercy and forgiveness are at the very heart of Christian identity. Within the Christian tradition, we understand that we receive mercy as a gift from God through Jesus Christ, yet Jesus expected that a gift of such magnificence, grace and magnitude that is so freely given and gladly received by us should be personally expressed in all of our relationships.

Love and mercy are not always easy. We should have love for our neighbour—that person in need whomever they are—and love should be

given in every way that we can. Love even for our enemies is, as Jesus said, not a suggestion but a command. He said, “Love your enemies and pray for them”.

To show mercy, and to act out of love, is not primarily a feeling but an act of will, even when we are deeply hurt and offended by someone else. It is to give to another what they do not deserve because we realise that we are the recipients of greater mercy.

What, then, is most important when it comes to the qualities of leadership? Is it charisma, intelligence, real-life experience, popularity or vision, or is it people who can be depended upon to show kindness, grace, forgiveness, and who have a generous heart and unconditional love and mercy in every circumstance?

Topical Question Time

14:05

Counsellor Funding (Colleges and Universities)

1. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on targeted counsellor funding for colleges and universities. (S6T-01299)

The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn): Since 2019-20, we have invested more than £13.5 million to provide almost 90 additional counsellors in colleges and universities. That exceeds our programme for government commitment to support the recruitment of 80 such posts. We are committed to meeting our programme for government commitment to provide additional funding for the entirety of the 2022-23 academic year. We are the only United Kingdom nation that is funding student counsellor provision in that way.

Pam Gosal: Last week, the Education, Children and Young People Committee published its report on college regionalisation, which found that targeted counsellor funding is critical for students. Has demand for mental health counselling increased over the four-year period in which dedicated funding for counsellors has been provided? How will future demand for such services be met if that financial support will not be available beyond the end of this academic year?

Jamie Hepburn: On Ms Gosal's final point, we have committed to publishing a student mental health action plan, which will be forthcoming very shortly. We have not made a final decision on funding beyond the end of this year. We recognise the importance of the investment that we have made thus far, and we want to continue to support students through what we know has been a difficult and challenging time. Fundamentally, the mental health action plan will seek to continue our response to that.

Pam Gosal: We already know that some colleges will be making drastic reductions in response to the Scottish National Party's funding settlement. One college is planning for staff redundancies at a rate of up to 25 per cent over the next few years. That situation is not unique. Twenty-one college principals have written to the Scottish Government to plead for help. Such counsellors can provide a life-saving service for many students who struggle with their mental health. Following those pleas, will the minister set out the Government's position on compulsory

redundancies and ensure that all college students can access the services that they need?

Jamie Hepburn: I am aware of the letter from the 21 college principals. As members would expect, the Government will, of course, reply to that letter. There has been very close contact with college principals to discuss the issues that we are touching on today. I have made it as clear to them as I am making it to Ms Gosal that we are committed to publishing a student mental health action plan, and I have said what we might be able to do in subsequent years. In relation to funding, we have leveraged in additional resources for colleges for the coming year.

I respectfully say to Ms Gosal that it is not good enough to call for additional funding—as she does week in, week out—for not just the college sector but virtually every sector that involves Government expenditure, without identifying where the money should come from, so I look forward to hearing her say where the money will come from.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): As members might expect, there is a lot of interest, so I ask for concise questions and responses to enable more members to take part.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): It is my understanding that since 2019-20, the Scottish Government has invested in almost 90 additional counsellors in colleges and universities. Some of those institutions are private organisations and have their own role to play in ensuring that there is provision for the wellbeing of their students.

Can the minister say something about how the work of those professionals, including those who are provided through Government funding, will complement the work of the upcoming student mental health plan?

Jamie Hepburn: Kaukab Stewart makes an important point—she is right to identify that the institutions for which we are providing funding have a fundamental core responsibility in that regard. They themselves have to ensure that they are adequately responding to and supporting their students' mental health needs.

We have assisted with that by providing a substantial package of funding to universities and colleges, and providing additional funding to support the recruitment of those counsellors. Through our student mental health action plan, we will seek to build on that to ensure that we support the resilience and mental wellbeing of students across the country.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): We know that 128,000 people have signed a petition to the United Kingdom Government calling for the creation of a statutory legal duty of care for students in higher education. A duty of care

already exists for staff and for students who are under 18. Would the minister explore the idea of introducing a statutory legal duty of care for students in colleges and universities?

Jamie Hepburn: I cannot say in earnest that it will be me who will be doing that, but the Government should reflect on that matter.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The minister said that no final decision has been made about future funding, which is a little bit more positive, but it leaves those staff in limbo. I hope that the minister will act with a little bit more haste and make a quicker decision on that, because the mental health counsellors have provided an invaluable service for vulnerable students across the college and university sector. How much longer will they have to wait?

Jamie Hepburn: I understand the point that Mr Rennie makes, and I take it seriously, because we have to try to provide that clarity. He will understand that we have to go through the usual process, but we have made that commitment to the student mental health action plan, which will come forward very soon. In my view, we should not disaggregate these issues too much, but I take on board his point that we need to provide institutions with clarity as soon as possible.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The health and wellbeing census shows that for many young people, challenges with their mental health begin at school, before college or university. Can the minister give an update on what progress has been made towards the Bute house agreement commitment that every young person has a right to access in-school mental health counselling if they require it? That should, one would hope, reduce the demand for college and university mental health support services.

Jamie Hepburn: That is a fair reminder that we have a duty to support the mental wellbeing of all young people in Scotland. We continue to provide £16 million to local authorities towards the commitment to ensure that every secondary school has access to counselling services.

Authorities across the country have confirmed that all schools have such access. Authorities provide the Scottish Government with six-monthly reports on those services, and the latest reports that we analysed showed that just over 14,500 young people accessed the services between January and June 2022, with more than 6,000 of them reporting improved outcomes. The majority of the remaining young people are still accessing the service and their outcomes are yet to be captured, but those will be reported in due course.

Poverty (Health Inequalities)

2. Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to recent reported analysis by Health Equals, which shows that poverty-driven health inequalities are reducing life expectancy among people who live in the most deprived areas. (S6T-01294)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): We are using all the powers and resources that are available to us to tackle poverty, reduce inequality and increase healthy life expectancy, and thereby create a fairer Scotland.

The Scottish Government has allocated almost £3 billion from 2021 to 2023 to mitigate the damage that has been inflicted on households by the United Kingdom Government's cost of living crisis. We are providing free school meals and increasing the number of hours of free childcare, and we have already increased the Scottish child payment to £25 per week. We have supported 1.85 million households with a council tax reduction and have uprated all the benefits that we deliver. We will continue to deliver free prescriptions, concessionary travel, free personal care and our fair work agenda.

Foysoil Choudhury: As co-convenor of the cross-party group on improving Scotland's health, and as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, I am well aware of the disparities in health in Scotland. In 2018, a study showed that a boy born in Muirhouse had a life expectancy 13 years less than that of a boy born in neighbouring Cramond. Analysis from The Health Foundation reported that average life expectancy in Scotland has reduced by 4.4 years since 2013. In addition, drug-related deaths have increased and are 18 times higher in the most deprived areas than they are in the least deprived ones.

Will the minister confirm what steps the Scottish Government has taken to address those health inequalities and the specific health conditions that disproportionately affect people from the most deprived areas?

Maree Todd: We absolutely recognise the clear and inextricable links between health inequalities and poverty. That is why we are using all the powers and resources that are available to us to support families as much as possible and to tackle the underlying causes of inequality through our national mission to tackle child poverty.

As Mr Choudhury is aware from being on the CPGs that he is on, we are also targeting people who have low incomes in reaching out to provide healthy, life-changing—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry. We are also targeting people who live in poverty

with the means to stop smoking. Measures such as minimum unit pricing of alcohol, which was aimed at the whole population, have had a particular impact on people who live in poverty; people who live in poverty have been helped most by that policy.

Foyso Choudhury: Poverty-driven health inequalities are preventing people with diabetes from accessing technological advances in treatment of their condition. That has been highlighted by Diabetes Scotland's "Diabetes tech can't wait" campaign. The technology has the potential to change and, indeed, to save the lives of people with type 1 diabetes. It can also reduce serious complications and reduce the strain on the national health service. Will the minister advise me what action the Government will take to tackle the inequalities of access to hybrid closed-loop diabetes technology that relate to socioeconomic background?

Maree Todd: Absolutely. That is a great question. Those people have real difficulty accessing and navigating healthcare. One of the reasons why people who experience health inequalities suffer poorer outcomes is that the system fails to listen and respond to them in the way that it listens and responds to people from wealthier and more educated backgrounds, who are more able to advocate for themselves. Undoubtedly, we will ensure that the system begins to listen to everyone.

I can write to Foyso Choudhury with details of how much money is going into the diabetes technologies. It is a tragedy that one of the greatest predictors of people's health and life expectancy is their wealth. The Parliament is determined to tackle that brutal tragedy. We will tackle it, but we will need cross-party support to make the bold decisions that will tackle the underlying causes of poverty as well as ensure that people who live in poverty can access equal healthcare.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The analysis to which Mr Choudhury referred makes it clear that 13 years of callous Tory austerity are now impacting on every inch of the United Kingdom. Recent research by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health also linked Tory-led austerity to worsening health outcomes in the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Glasgow and Dundee. Will the minister reiterate the Scottish Government's commitment to taking action within its powers to tackle the root causes of poverty and associated health inequalities?

Maree Todd: Emma Harper is absolutely right to raise that issue. *[Interruption.]* Foyso Choudhury, too, mentioned the key year of 2013 as being when we started to see life expectancy reduce in Scotland. That is, the academics tell us,

because of the Tory-Lib Dem austerity measures, which they brought in in 2010—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the minister.

Maree Todd: It is a policy that is absolutely life shortening for people in Scotland. It has had a life-shortening impact on people living in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I hear members chuntering from sedentary positions, but for 16 years—the academics are exceptionally clear on this point—austerity and the political choice to pursue austerity politics have been life shortening for people in Scotland, and continue to be so.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time.

First Minister

14:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is the selection of the Parliament's nominee as First Minister. A note explaining the procedures that are to be followed this afternoon has been made available to members.

I have received four valid nominations for selection of the Parliament's nominee for First Minister. I will now announce the nominations in alphabetical order. They are Alex Cole-Hamilton, Douglas Ross, Anas Sarwar and Humza Yousaf. I will ask each nominee to speak in support of their candidacy, for up to five minutes.

After the nominees have spoken, members will be asked to cast their vote for their preferred candidate. A separate vote will be called for each candidate, and members can vote only once. Once all voting has been completed, any member who has not yet voted will be invited to cast a vote to abstain. There will be a short suspension while the result is verified and I will then announce the results of voting.

A candidate will be elected if an overall majority is obtained. If no majority is obtained, the candidate or candidates with the smallest number of votes will be eliminated. I ask members to note that, if we have a vote between only two candidates, all that is required is a simple majority for one of the candidates to be elected. Members might wish to record an abstention; no account of those votes will be taken in establishing whether a simple majority has been achieved. We will then proceed to a further round of voting.

14:22

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I rise to speak to my candidacy for the office of First Minister of Scotland. I am a candidate in this contest because this is a democracy. Democracies are about the presentation of differing visions of how things could be and about bringing to the fore the priorities of the constituents who sent us all here to this place.

Here and now, we are as far as it is possible to be from a Scottish parliamentary election. We are midstream and have a governing party that is in disarray, adrift and out of ideas. It brings to mind the words of Robert Browning, who, nearly two centuries ago, wrote:

"Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country."

The members in the chamber will reject my candidacy today. I understand that, but ours is a

vision for that better country. You will not find a prospectus that is more positive and more ambitious from anyone else, because Liberal Democrats believe in a Scotland that is industrious, innovative and internationalist of outlook.

I want us to imagine things again, to make things again and to harness the collective potential of our people and our natural resources—a Scotland that delivers for those working in our schools, hospitals and fields. They are tired of the ministerial disinterest that has characterised much of the past 16 years and of a Government that is fixated on the break-up of the United Kingdom.

We have to put the people first. Liberal Democrats understand what matters to them because we asked them, door by door and street by street, in the villages and towns of Scotland. They want to know when they will get that hip replacement. They want to know why their kid has been left behind in school or is left waiting for mental health treatment. They want to know why they have to live in a cold home. They are looking to this chamber for the answer and that is why I am in politics. It is what keeps me awake at night.

Liberal Democrats would cut waiting times and abandon the SNP paradigm of social care. We would deliver an emergency insulation programme that would make every home warm, while slashing our carbon emissions. We would strive to make our classrooms into inviting places to work and to learn by always paying our teachers what they are worth, tackling violence in our schools and scrapping national testing. Liberal Democrats are, by nature, solutions focused. We are crackling with policy ideas and, my goodness, do we not need some of those right now?

Our world is changing. Scotland faces big, international questions. Our world is on fire in the climate emergency. We are witness to the mass displacement of people fleeing unimaginable atrocities, and we will come to look back on this time with an understanding that we were already living in the early days of a new cold war. Those challenges demand a new politics of hope and of democratic reform, and of common endeavour across nations that share our values and our corner of this world. I stand today on that ticket.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats are the party of co-operation across these islands. We are the party of local power through federalism and, yes, we are the true party of Europe. Members should make no mistake: there is more water behind this Government than lies ahead of it. Change is coming and the Liberal Democrats will be a part of what is next. If we want it to, that change could start with this vote this afternoon. We do not have to settle for continuity, for mediocrity, or for more of the divisive and dreary same. That other bank

could be in sight, so we just have to reach for it now, for a better country.

14:26

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

In 2021, I put myself forward as my party's candidate for First Minister because I believed that Scotland needed a real alternative that was focused on the big challenges that our country was facing. Now, at the end of the Sturgeon era and after a fractious SNP leadership election, it is clear that that alternative is still needed.

The nationalist Government is moving further away from the real priorities of Scottish people, such as helping struggling families to get through the global cost of living crisis, or helping those who want our Scottish economy to flourish once more, or rebuilding our demoralised and overstretched NHS. Those are the big challenges that we are facing today and that Scottish people want every member of the Scottish Parliament to be laser-focused on. Instead, we have seen the party of Government being consumed by the debate on independence and by furthering its nationalist obsession. The SNP has been fiddling while Rome burns. It has abdicated responsibility for governing our country in favour of attempting to reboot its tired campaign for separation.

Humza Yousaf has been at the forefront of that debate. He has said that every election should be about independence. He has proclaimed himself to be the first activist of the nationalist movement and, yesterday, in his very first act as leader of his party, he demanded another independence referendum from the United Kingdom Government. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Let us hear Mr Ross.

Douglas Ross: That was an image, if we needed it, that showed that the nationalists have the wrong priorities for the country. At a time when our country needs national leadership, we have yet again been given another nationalist leader, but one who is even more divisive than the last. Humza Yousaf will not bring Scotland together. He will not focus on the big challenges that are facing our economy, our public services and families up and down the country. In the past month, he has been running our NHS part-time while prioritising his own leadership ambitions.

In this, his final day as health secretary, figures show that just 63 per cent of patients were seen at accident and emergency within the target times. That is down from 87 per cent, when he was given that most important of jobs within the Government.

His fellow cabinet member, Kate Forbes, was absolutely right to be scathing about his record in

government and, it turns out that almost half of the SNP members in the election agreed with her.

Scotland needs a real alternative who is focused on the big challenges that our country is facing. That is why, as leader of the main Opposition party in this chamber, I am putting myself forward for the position of First Minister.

Now, we already know the way that the votes will go. Humza Yousaf has stitched up a backroom deal with the Greens to keep his nationalist Government in power. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members, thank you.

Douglas Ross: I will repeat that: Humza Yousaf has stitched up a backroom deal with the Greens to keep his nationalist Government in power and, with an anti-growth party in Government, Scotland will sadly be the poorer as a result.

Today is about the future, too, because the contest that the SNP has just been through shows beyond any doubt that the SNP is not invincible and that continued nationalist government in Scotland is not inevitable. As we enter the post-Sturgeon era, we can see that a post-SNP Scotland is in reach, with a chance to bin the nationalist neverendums and put the real priorities of Scottish people first. It is past time that the SNP paid the price for its failures in Government and its single-minded focus on dividing our country with another independence referendum. To make that happen, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party is the only party that can beat the SNP in communities across Scotland in both next year's general election and the next Scottish Parliament election.

Over the past two years, my party has been building a positive programme that is focused on the real challenges that Scotland faces. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members, thank you.

Douglas Ross: I am not sure why SNP members laugh when I am about to speak about the proposed right to addiction recovery bill, which we have published. The bill will tackle Scotland's drug deaths scandal, and it has been endorsed by members from all sides of the chamber.

In addition, we have set out our plans for a rural development bank to invest in infrastructure that rural communities and farming businesses need to thrive; we are bringing forward a victims law that will ensure that we place the justice system on the side of victims and not that of criminals; we have set out plans for a rent-to-own model and tax cuts for first-time buyers that will ensure that home ownership in Scotland is not an unaffordable dream and can become reality; and we have plans to deliver a skills revolution to ensure that every Scot has a right to retrain. Those are just some of

the positive policies from the platform that we have been building.

Today, nationalists in the chamber will give Humza Yousaf a blank cheque to again push forward his party's independence obsession. However, in the elections to come, Scotland can make the SNP pay the price for ignoring our real priorities. In so many areas across Scotland, the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party is the only party that can make that happen.

14:32

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Scotland's incoming First Minister has been left with an overflowing in-tray to deal with. Our country is in the grip of two devastating crises: an NHS crisis that has been brought about by the current SNP Administration's failure to prepare, and a cost of living crisis that was created in Downing Street, with rising bills, higher food costs and rampant inflation. Our next First Minister must urgently prioritise those challenges. The people of Scotland will expect nothing less, and they will not forgive a First Minister who chooses instead to focus on their own priorities. I pledge to always put the people's priorities first, because, following Nicola Sturgeon's long period in office, we need a First Minister for all of Scotland and not just for half of the country.

As someone once said,

"More of the same ... is an acceptance of mediocrity"

and

"Continuity won't cut it".

The conclusion of the bitter SNP leadership contest does not bring an end to the division and incompetence that has been on display in recent weeks. When we look at the in-tray that is waiting in Bute house, it is clear to us that we need a First Minister who does not have the distraction of a broken political party behind them and who is without the culture of secrecy and cover-up that has been the hallmark of 16 years of SNP Government.

It is a regime that has left us with record accident and emergency waiting times, with one in seven Scots on an NHS waiting list; record numbers of drug deaths; record numbers of vacancies for nurses and doctors in our NHS; record levels of homelessness; an entrenched attainment gap; falling business numbers; the ferries scandal; broken promises on green jobs; devastating cuts to councils; and, only last week, in the Scottish Government's own report, the damning verdict on child poverty that there has been "little recent change".

We need change. People across our country are crying out for answers to the real issues that they

are facing. Our task is to show that Scotland can have a better, more exciting and more prosperous future if we unleash our country's potential.

A better future for Scotland starts with a plan to unlock the extraordinary talents and innovation of the Scottish people and create more highly paid jobs, high-tech industries and opportunities to reskill, so that working people in Scotland are better off. We want a Scotland where our public services are once again the envy of the world. Scotland is crying out for change, but a new SNP First Minister will not be enough. Scotland needs something different from a continuity candidate.

After years of failure under this SNP Administration, we need a First Minister who truly believes in the extraordinary potential of the Scottish people. I know that our country can do so much better, but we need a First Minister with the political will, the belief in our people and our nation and the driving ambition to deliver the change that Scotland needs. We need a First Minister with the determination to save our NHS by increasing capacity in A and E, providing better NHS 24 support, freeing up beds and valuing our NHS staff by improving their working conditions.

We need a First Minister who is willing to listen to the worries of people and businesses across Scotland as they struggle with the cost of living crisis and who is prepared to take action to help. We need a first Minister who recognises that being green is not about propping up a failed Government in return for ministerial jobs but is about delivering actual green jobs and putting Scotland at the heart of the UK's renewables revolution. Being First Minister is about having a plan that delivers economic growth and innovation, encourages good business and supports employees. It is about fulfilling the promise of home ownership that has been dashed for far too many in Scotland and refusing to accept that "little recent change" is enough to tackle poverty, and instead making that the defining mission of the office of First Minister.

I know that everyone in this chamber has made up their mind and is not open to persuasion, but I am more interested in winning the debate in the country than in this chamber. People across the country deserve better than a Government that is focused on its own priorities rather than the people's. My promise to those watching across Scotland is that I will work day and night to earn their trust and win their support, because this is not as good as it gets. Change is possible and I am determined that the Scottish Labour Party that I lead will deliver the change that Scotland needs.

14:37

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Presiding Officer, it is the privilege of my life to stand before you and my fellow members as a nominee to be First Minister of Scotland. Although I have, of course, made up my mind about who I am voting for, I thank the other nominees for their remarks.

When my predecessor made her opening contribution on this occasion in 2014, she rightly remarked that to have two female party leaders—herself and Ruth Davidson—nominated was a good advert for modern Scotland. She was right. It is also a signal of the progress that we have made as a country that, as well as having a Parliament in which two of the candidates putting themselves forward today are from minority ethnic communities, a majority of MSPs in this Parliament belong to two parties led by people of colour and of the Muslim faith. The fact that no one bats an eyelid at that tells me that we are making progress in our nation, of which we should all be very proud indeed. [*Applause.*]

Although I intend to keep my comments relatively brief ahead of the vote, there is no doubt that Nicola Sturgeon leaves some very big shoes to fill. As well as her many domestic achievements, to which I hope to pay tribute after Parliament has voted, she has built up an international profile for the office of First Minister that leaders of many independent countries—never mind those of devolved Governments—can only dream of. The fact that Scotland is playing such a significant role in many of the key international issues of the day, such as tackling climate change, renewable energy and the wellbeing economy is, in huge part, down to her leadership. Everyone holding the office of First Minister, no matter their views on Scottish independence, should aspire to do likewise. If Parliament votes for me today, I pledge that I will continue to ensure that Scotland is a positive, progressive voice on the world stage.

Over the past few weeks, I and my fellow SNP candidates have had the pleasure of travelling the length and breadth of Scotland, participating in party hustings and debates and also meeting countless local businesses, community groups and members of the public. There is no doubt that people and businesses are feeling the significant pressures of the cost of living crisis. The first job of any First Minister is to keep people safe and to lead them through the tough times and, if elected, that is exactly what I intend to do.

However, what I have also seen over the past few weeks is that people are optimistic. They are ambitious about the future of Scotland. We must always give people hope. We have come through so much together as a country, particularly in the

past few years, and we have demonstrated a resilience that many of us thought we did not have. It is often in the darkest of hours that we see the best of humanity. Never has that been more true than during the global pandemic.

In tough times, it is often easy to forget how lucky we are to live in a country that is blessed with such immense natural resources and human talent—one that is brimming with potential and ingenuity. I very firmly believe that Scotland's best days lie in front of us and, as First Minister, I will work tirelessly to make sure that that is the case.

I have been privileged to hold ministerial office for over a decade, and in that time, it is fair to say, I have been tested in what I am sure most people would agree are some of the toughest roles in Government. I have never shied away from those responsibilities—in fact, I see it as an honour to be entrusted with them. I have always believed that leadership is about running towards and embracing challenges rather than shying away from them.

We might not be able to achieve everything that we want all the time and all at once, but every day in office is an opportunity to make things a bit better than they were yesterday, and I will always be impatient to go faster. If the Parliament chooses me today as its nomination for First Minister, I will never shy away from tackling the big issues that our country faces. I will lead a Government that listens carefully and respects the views of all MSPs. My starting point will always be that we all want the best for Scotland and the people that we are so privileged to represent, and I will stand up unequivocally for this Parliament and against any attempts to undermine devolution.

I will work every hour of every day to harness the potential of Scotland and every single person in it. I will place no limits on the ambitions that we have, collectively, for ourselves, for our country or indeed for the world that we live in.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Before we move on to the vote, there will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

14:42

Meeting suspended.

14:47

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote. [*Interruption.*] Can we have quiet? Thank you, colleagues.

I remind members that they must vote once only and must use only their yes button in the voting

app when voting. If any member records a vote other than a yes vote, we will re-run the voting question. Once the voting for candidates is completed, members who have not voted for a candidate will be given the opportunity to vote to abstain by pressing the yes button.

I will announce the result once all votes have been cast and verified.

The first vote is for Alex Cole-Hamilton. Only members who wish to cast their vote for Alex Cole-Hamilton should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Alex Cole-Hamilton should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The next vote is for Douglas Ross. Only members who wish to cast their vote for Douglas Ross should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other member should vote. Members who wish to vote for Douglas Ross should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sorry, but my app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

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

The next vote is for Anas Sarwar. Only members who wish to cast their vote for Anas Sarwar should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Anas Sarwar should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed.

The next vote is for Humza Yousaf. Only members who wish to cast their vote for Humza Yousaf should take part in this vote, by voting yes. No other members should vote. Members who wish to vote for Humza Yousaf should vote yes now.

Members voted.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed.

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that you have voted, Mr Stewart.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded, Ms Somerville.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded, Ms Stevenson.

The Minister for Equalities and Older People (Christina McKelvie): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app has frozen. I would have voted yes, of course.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded, Ms McKelvie.

That concludes the votes for all candidates. The next vote is for any members who have not yet voted and who wish to record an abstention.

That concludes this round of voting. There will now be a suspension while the votes are verified.

14:56

Meeting suspended.

15:01

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: In this round of voting in the selection of the Parliament's nominee as First Minister, the number of votes cast for each candidate was: Alex Cole-Hamilton 4, Douglas Ross 31, Anas Sarwar 22, Humza Yousaf 71.

Votes for Alex Cole-Hamilton

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Votes for Douglas Ross

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (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)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (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)

Votes for Anas Sarwar

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (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)

Votes for Humza Yousaf

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)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dorman, 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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: As an overall majority has been reached, the candidate selected as the Parliament's nominee for the position of First Minister is Humza Yousaf. [*Applause.*] I will now call each of the party leaders to respond.

15:02

Douglas Ross: I begin by recognising this historic moment. I congratulate Humza Yousaf personally on his selection. I know what an honour it will be for him and how proud it will make his family, who are watching here today. I also congratulate him as the first person from an ethnic minority to become First Minister. The fact that both the First Minister and the Prime Minister represent the UK's diverse communities sends a strong, positive message to everyone that in this country there are no barriers to what they can achieve. We can all be proud of that. [*Applause.*]

That is probably where the consensus will end, but those are genuine, heartfelt comments. [*Laughter.*]

I have to say, though, that, regrettably, the new First Minister seems to be doing his best to imitate his predecessor. Instead of setting out a platform to focus on Scotland's real priorities, Humza Yousaf has confirmed that he wants to continue the constitutional conflict with the UK Government,

and to continue to attempt to appeal to his divided party rather than the wider Scottish public. The record player has changed, but the tune remains the same. History will look back and judge this to have been a massive missed opportunity for our country.

Although Scottish Conservatives will always look to co-operate with the Scottish Government when it is exclusively focused on tackling the big challenges that Scotland faces, the tone that Humza Yousaf has set for his Government, in choosing to double down on his party's independence obsession, suggests that those moments might be few and far between. Scottish Conservatives will hold Humza Yousaf's Government to account when it strays away from the key challenges that Scotland faces today. In this Parliament we will always stand up for the ideas and values that represent the real priorities of Scottish people.

I note that, with the election of Humza Yousaf as his party's leader, we remain in the position that I am the only party leader who does not represent a seat in one of Scotland's two largest cities. That gives the Scottish Conservatives additional responsibilities: to stand up for all our villages, towns and cities; to be a champion for rural Scotland; and to represent the whole country.

I also note that, with Humza Yousaf's election to head up the SNP, I am the only leader of a major political party in Scotland not to have been privately educated at Hutchesons' grammar school. Coming from a working-class background, I attended my local schools: Alves primary and Forres academy.

Increasingly, it is the Scottish Conservatives who represent the values of working Scotland in the Parliament. As we have shown time and again, on the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, on the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 and on the named person scheme, the Scottish Conservatives are the only ones speaking up for the views of a clear majority of the Scottish public.

Voters across Scotland expect the parties in the Parliament to focus on their priorities, rather than the parties' own political obsessions. Any party that fails to do that should pay the price for that failure. We were all elected to solve the big challenges facing Scotland. Today, those challenges are as stark as ever: an NHS in crisis, families struggling with the cost of living crisis and an underperforming Scottish economy. It is incumbent on us all to focus on those issues. Let us get on with the job of tackling them for the people of Scotland.

15:06

Anas Sarwar: On behalf of Scottish Labour, I offer Humza Yousaf my sincerest congratulations on being nominated as our next First Minister.

Humza Yousaf and I have known each other for many years. I know that, today, he and his family will enjoy a feeling of pride in what he has achieved; I offer a special thought for his wife, his beautiful girls, his mum and dad and his sister, who will all, rightly, be proud today. Regardless of our politics, we should all take immense pride in the fact that our country is to have its first minority ethnic First Minister. Whatever our political differences—there will be many in the months ahead—today's significance cannot be understated. It is something that our grandparents would never have imagined when they arrived in Scotland and made this country their home.

However, reaching this historic moment has not been easy. I know that Humza Yousaf has faced personal abuse and racism—as have so many others who do not have the platform that he and I are fortunate to have. I am proud of the work that he and I have done alongside others to stand against hatred and bigotry. Humza, I promise that I will continue to stand alongside you in that fight for us all. *[Applause.]*

In extending my congratulations to Humza Yousaf on being appointed as the first First Minister from a minority ethnic background, for obvious reasons I hope that he is not the last. In the meantime, as I said in my earlier remarks, we need a First Minister for all of Scotland. I understand that, during the SNP leadership contest, which we all watched in disbelief, he had to pander to his party faithful by promising to prioritise independence. I urge him to leave the inward-looking, divisive approach behind and to work on behalf of every person in our country, regardless of their constitutional position.

Nothing is more important right now than the twin crises that our nation faces: the NHS crisis, created by the SNP Government, and the cost of living crisis, exacerbated by the Tories. That is not all that is in the in-tray. The new First Minister has been left to pick up a catalogue of failure by his predecessors and the challenge ahead is immense.

After 15 years of SNP rule, not a single institution in Scotland is stronger. I hope that this moment ushers in some better governance for the people of Scotland, but if I am honest, I do not hold out much hope. It is clear that the SNP does not have the answers that Scotland needs. The First Minister now leads a chaotic and divided party, out of touch and out of ideas.

There are those who would describe today's events as a coronation without an election. One might even say that it is

"a farce inflicted on Scotland"

and that the SNP has

"failed the democratic test."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; c 4158-9.]

I know that that might cause discomfort for some on the Government benches. However, those are not my words; they were said by John Swinney, when he made his speech in 2001.

Mr Yousaf has inherited the SNP's woeful record, but he has not inherited Nicola Sturgeon's mandate. That is why we need an election. It is only through a change of Government that we will be able to deliver the better governance that Scotland needs. If the First Minister is, as he describes himself, "a democracy defender", he will call an election now. However, if he lacks the courage for that, the least that we can ask is that he uses the power of Government to change people's lives for the better.

This Parliament has the immense power to change Scotland—the opportunity is ahead of us and we should take it.

I repeat my promise: where we can find consensus or common cause in the chamber, we should work together. When we disagree, as we inevitably will, we in the Labour Party will always attempt to offer positive alternatives. It is the job of everyone in the chamber to look to the future, not the past, and to help to realise the unfulfilled potential of devolution. We can do that if we rise to the ambition of the people of Scotland—for that, I will strive every day. Humza Yousaf must do the same.

15:10

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): My Scottish Green colleagues and I were delighted to vote for Humza Yousaf as our next First Minister. That follows the unanimous decision by our party council yesterday to continue with the Bute house agreement between the Scottish Greens and the Scottish Government.

Today represents an historic milestone—Humza Yousaf is our youngest-ever First Minister, our first Muslim leader and the first minority ethnic leader of a devolved Government in the UK. It also represents the continuation of our historic agreement, which brought Greens into Government for the first time in the UK. Humza Yousaf has been a great supporter of the Bute house agreement; that support has been consistent and strong throughout the past six

weeks, and for that, he has my and my party's gratitude.

Let me remind members why the Bute house agreement is so important to us and to the future of Scotland. First, the agreement is built on a shared commitment to constructive, collaborative and grown-up politics. Politics that builds on good faith and trust as its core values is the type of grown-up and collaborative politics that this Parliament was designed to embody, and which citizens take for granted in other European countries. We sit here today in this horseshoe shape for a reason. The design of the chamber seeks to reject the adversarial "opposition for opposition's sake" style of Westminster politics. As many Parliaments across Europe do, here in Holyrood we sit together in a semicircle to build consensus across the chamber.

Secondly, the Bute house agreement reflects the pro-independence ambition that Scotland voted for in 2021. It delivers a Government that is committed to Scotland becoming a modern independent nation at the heart of the European Union. I look forward to the two parties of Government continuing to build and make that case.

Finally, the agreement is based on a bold and progressive policy platform that is making Scotland fairer and greener. I am proud of what we have delivered in the first 18 months of our collaborative Government. That includes an emergency rent freeze, free bus travel for young people, record funding for tackling the nature and climate emergencies, doubling of the Scottish child payment, an active travel investment programme that rivals the best of our European neighbours' programmes, an energy strategy that recognises that we need to leave oil and gas in the ground, and more.

I look forward to building on those successes and delivering more for the people of Scotland, our climate and our environment, because our work has only just begun. From delivering on our commitment to create highly protected marine areas—so that our oceans can regenerate after decades of decline—to a bold new climate plan, we will deliver a greener Scotland. From bringing in permanent rent controls and new rights for tenants to delivering new social security protections, we will deliver a fairer Scotland, and from banning cruel conversion practices and bringing in safe access zones around abortion clinics, we will deliver a more compassionate Scotland.

I conclude by saying that my Scottish Green colleagues and I look forward to working with the new First Minister and Scottish Government to deliver a fairer and greener independent Scotland. It is needed now more than ever.

15:14

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I offer the congratulations of the Scottish Liberal Democrats to Humza Yousaf on his nomination as First Minister. I wish a belated Ramadan Mubarak to him and to his family in the gallery. A person of Humza Yousaf's faith and ethnicity ascending to the highest office in the land is a truly historic moment in our nation's progress.

I hope that Humza Yousaf was made to feel welcome in Murrayfield yesterday. Members might recall that he was also there four weeks ago during the recent council by-election. I believe it to be a sign of things to come that his presence and involvement in that campaign saw the SNP lose a third of its vote, and the seat, to the Liberal Democrats in the largest by-election victory in my party's history.

I first got to know Humza Yousaf during another Ramadan, 11 years ago, when I was in youth work. I took him on a community shift in Govan. He was fasting—he had not had a drop of water or anything to eat—and we walked for nine miles over five hours, talking to young people along the way and engaging them in activities. As Humza Yousaf had been recently elected, he did not want that to get in the way of his interactions with the people whom we met, and he asked me and the other youth workers to introduce him simply as "Harry". We duly did that; everything went fine and he was not recognised. However, when we reached Elder Park, one young lad piped up and said, "Yeah, but aren't you Harry Yousaf off the telly?"

The measure of effective leadership is to listen to good ideas and to recognise that a good idea is a good idea regardless of whether it comes from people like the kids in Govan or from the Opposition. It is about being willing to reach across the aisles when times get tough, as we all did in the early days of the pandemic.

The measure of effective leadership is to raise the standard of public debate above the divisions of the past. It is about grown-up politics. In 16 years, we have not seen a great deal of that.

The new First Minister has said that he will talk to all Opposition party leaders. I welcome that—he has my number. I will tell him about our desire for a dedicated mental health minister who will actually reduce waiting lists; about the desperate need for more support and meaningful care pathways for the nearly 200,000 Scots who are suffering from long Covid; about the mums in the far north who are forced, because their maternity unit was closed, to travel two hours down the treacherous A9 to give birth; about how we can lift attainment in our schools through a nursery premium, and by attracting and retaining the best

teachers; about the deposit return scheme, which is a pig's ear of a good idea that will take Scottish produce off Scottish shelves; and about why this Government needs to stop the dumping of raw sewage into our rivers and on to our beaches. I could go on.

There is a disconnect between the focus of the governing parties and the needs and interests of this country. People are turning away from the divisions of the past, and their patience for those who deviate from what matters to them is finite. Change is coming for both our Governments. We need to fix our broken politics and restore integrity.

I did not prevail today but, just as it did in Murrayfield, change is coming and the Scottish Liberal Democrats will be part of what is next. For now, I want to recognise that this is a significant day for Humza Yousaf, as it is for the progress of diversity in our country. Well done, Harry.

15:18

Humza Yousaf: I thank the other party leaders for their remarks. I am very aware, of course, that they might not be so nice to me ever again. Although the vote might have seemed like a formality, the fact that a few of my colleagues raised a point of order just after voting for me raised my blood pressure ever so slightly. I remind Anas Sarwar that I have his father's number on speed dial so, if he is not nice to me, I will be having words.

The generosity of the comments that have been made matches the spirit of the remarks that Donald Dewar made 24 years ago when he became Scotland's first First Minister. He emphasised the "common aims" that we share across the chamber of giving people

"a better life and a better future."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1999; c 25.]

The Government that I lead will very much dedicate itself to those aims, and I hope to work with colleagues from all parties in doing so.

This is a proud day for me and a proud day for my family. I can hear my three-year-old speaking to me and see her waving to me from the gallery—I am only on my second page, darling; there is a little bit more to come. I hope that it is also a proud day for Scotland. It speaks to our values as a country that I stand here as the first-ever Muslim to lead a western democratic nation. Try telling that to 16-year-old Humza Yousaf, who, post-9/11, was questioned constantly about his loyalty to this country. Collectively, we have come a long way.

I am joined by too many family members and friends to mention, but I hope that the chamber will indulge me, as there are a few I would like to mention. My mum and dad have always been

unwavering in their support of me. It was often the norm of expectation that we, as young Scots Asians, would end up as doctors, dentists, pharmacists, accountants or lawyers. I remember vividly the nerves that I felt in the pit of my stomach on the day that I decided to tell my parents that I wanted to study politics instead of law. Far from giving me a clip around the ear, as my mum put it in news reports yesterday, they could not have been more supportive, saying that it was vital that people like us were represented in politics. From that day to this very moment, they have encouraged me every single step of the way. I could not be making history without them.

To my wife and my girls, you are my everything, and being First Minister will not change that. It might mean that you see me slightly less often, but I say to my three-year-old, Amal, in particular to be aware that there are plenty of stairs in Bute house, so if you misbehave, there will still be a naughty step to put you on—although I am pleased that, so far, everyone seems to be on their best behaviour.

The years after 9/11 were not easy for Muslims growing up in Scotland or, indeed, elsewhere across the UK. I have lost count of how many times my identity or loyalty to Scotland—the only country that I have ever called, and will ever call, home—has been questioned over the years. There was a time not all that long ago when I felt that I simply did not belong here in Scotland.

I hope that my going from there to now leading the Government as Scotland's sixth First Minister sends a strong message to every single person out there who feels that they do not belong. No matter what anyone says, no matter who you are, no matter whether Scotland has been your home for a day or for 10 generations, no matter your ethnicity, no matter your gender, no matter your religion and no matter your sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability, this is your home. Do not let anyone ever tell you that you are not good enough. Do not let anyone ever tell you that you do not belong. As First Minister, I will always fight for your rights and, where possible, I will do everything that I can to advance them.

I will always stand up for social justice more widely and for making Scotland a fairer, as well as a wealthier, nation. A key priority of my Government will be to protect every Scot, as far as we can, from the harm that has been inflicted by the cost of living crisis. One of my first conversations as First Minister will be with anti-poverty groups to explore what more we can do, within our devolved powers, to tackle child poverty.

We will protect and reform our NHS, social care and other vital public services to support a wellbeing economy and improve the life chances of people right across our country.

We will rapidly develop plans to extend childcare, improve rural housing, support small businesses and boost innovation.

We will keep the promise that we have made to people with experience of the care system. We will do so not just for young people—as important as that is, of course—because we recognise that care experience is lifelong.

We will bring forward reforms of the criminal justice system, continue our work to reduce the number of drug deaths and create a new deal with local government to empower local authorities to meet the challenges of the day.

We will support businesses, we will seize the economic and social opportunities of a just transition to net zero and we will continue to ensure that Scotland uses its voice on the international stage.

On Thursday, I will nominate the team of ministers who will deliver on those priorities. I will then set out more detailed policies to the chamber in the first week after the Easter recess.

I will be very proud to build on the record of the Government that was led by Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney: the Scottish child payment, the expansion of childcare, Scotland's international leadership on the transition to net zero and their championing of equality. Through all those achievements and many more besides, Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney have left a significant legacy, for which I am very grateful to them, but I know that there is so much more to come from both of them—well, certainly once Nicola has finished taking her driving theory test, of course.

I will also continue to argue tirelessly, as they did, for independence. My view—it is of, course, the view of the majority in the Parliament—is that we will be able to deliver on our priorities more effectively when Scotland is independent. We will certainly deliver them less effectively if we allow the UK Government to arbitrarily veto this Parliament's legislation.

Unsurprisingly, I will argue vigorously for independence. While I do so, I understand that the strongest argument that the Government can make for independence is to make the best possible use of the Parliament's existing powers. I want to reach out to other parties across the chamber as I do that, which is why the point on which I end today is not so much what the Government will do but how we will do it.

At the start of my speech, I stressed the common aims and values that we all share. Listening to many of the remarks that have been made in the chamber, not just today but after Nicola Sturgeon's statement last Thursday, I think that there is probably a shared appetite across the

chamber for a politics that is slightly less polarised and a bit less confrontational.

The Government already works in co-operation with the Green Party under the Bute house agreement. That will continue, but I also make an open offer to all leaders of all parties in the chamber. I do not make this offer naively; I know that we will continue quite frequently to disagree forcefully. That is as it should be—politics requires strong, reasoned, respectful disagreement.

For all those disagreements, however, I know that we share many areas of common ground, including many of the areas that have been outlined not just by me but by each party leader today. That is why I will request early meetings with the leaders of other parties in the chamber. I want to work with you, where we can, to achieve those shared aims. I believe that there is a willingness for that in the chamber, and a desire for it across the country.

Just as I will reach out within this Parliament, I will reach out beyond it, too. To the UK Government, I stress that I will work with you where I can, when I can, in the best interests of our nation. To our vital partners in local government, the business community, the third sector and the wider public sector, I promise that this Government will listen to you and will work with you. Above all else, to the people of Scotland, I make this pledge: I will never forget that I am First Minister for all of Scotland, regardless of who you voted for, where you live or where you have come from.

Yesterday, I mentioned my grandparents. In recent days, I have also thought a lot about my great friend and mentor, the late Bashir Ahmad. He, too, came to Scotland in the 1960s—he started off driving buses, and he became the first member of this Parliament from an ethnic minority. He was by far the kindest and most gentle soul I have ever known, and I think that if we were all a little bit more like Bashir, our world would be in a far better place.

He used to say that it is not important where you come from; what matters is where we are going together as a nation. It is a phrase that I think of often, and a phrase that will guide how I and my Government govern. The Parliament has just given me the opportunity to help steer this nation's course, as we make the next stage of that journey together. Doing that will be the honour and the privilege of my life, and I will strive every single minute of every day to be worthy of it. I look forward to working with each and every one of you as I do so in the best interests of our nation. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: On behalf of the Parliament, I congratulate Humza Yousaf as the

Parliament's nominee for the position of First Minister. I look forward to working with him.

Business Motion

15:29

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-08434, 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 18 April 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister's Statement: Scottish Government Priorities

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Cost of Living and Child Poverty

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 19 April 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: Scotland's Finances and the Wellbeing Economy

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 20 April 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 Scottish Government Debate: Climate Change and the Just Transition

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Tuesday 25 April 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 26 April 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)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 April 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:
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 17 April 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]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

15:29

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-08435 to S6M-08438, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and S6M-08439, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2022 Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Crime (International Co-operation) Act 2003 (Designation of Participating Countries) (Scotland) Order 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 Amendment Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Incidental Provision) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.—[George Adam]

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

Motion without Notice

15:30

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders that decision time be brought forward to now. I invite the Minister for Parliamentary Business to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 3.30 pm.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

15:30

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. I propose to ask a single question on five Parliamentary Bureau motions, if no member objects.

The question is, that motions S6M-08435 to S6M-08438, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motion S6M-08439, on the designation of a lead committee, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2022 Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Crime (International Co-operation) Act 2003 (Designation of Participating Countries) (Scotland) Order 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 Amendment Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Incidental Provision) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will now move to members' business. There will be a brief suspension to allow the gallery and the chamber to clear.

15:31

Meeting suspended.

15:35

On resuming—

St Andrew's Children's Society

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07711, in the name of Christine Grahame, on St Andrew's Children's Society. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates St Andrew's Children's Society on marking its centenary in 2022; understands that St Andrew's Children's Society is the oldest adoption and fostering agency still in existence in Scotland; recognises what it sees as the valuable work that the Society does connecting vulnerable children to safe and loving homes, including in the Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency; understands that it is the only agency in Scotland to offer the SafeBase parenting programme, which is a therapeutic programme for parents of adopted and fostered children who have attachment difficulties; notes that over £20,000 has been raised during the centenary and that a number of events have been held, including a Family February FUNdraising challenge, a fundraising concert by Cadenza and a parliamentary reception in the Scottish Parliament, and that a special commemorative booklet was also written by Maureen McEvoy MBE; pays credit to all of the staff and volunteers who have supported the Society over the last 100 years, with particular credit to the adopted and foster parents who have provided safe and loving homes to their adopted and foster children, and extends its best wishes to all who are involved in adoption and fostering.

15:36

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I understand that this debate is the highlight of today.

First, I congratulate members of St Andrew's Children's Society, who would have been here had decision time been at 5 pm. Fortunately, I was able to alert them that there was a change of time. I also thank those who signed my motion, allowing the debate to go ahead, and those who have stayed behind in the face of competing attractions on this auspicious day.

The motion marks the centenary of the society, which is understood to be the oldest adoption and fostering agency in Scotland. Its history and its procedures today reflect the changing societal attitudes to single mothers, which were addressed so poignantly in the chamber last week when the then First Minister offered an apology to those who were forced to give up their babies who were born out of what we call "wedlock". I am old enough to recall the attitudes of those days and I will expand on that shortly.

Recently, I sponsored an event in Parliament to commemorate the centenary of the society, and I

was very moved by the accounts of two recent adopters. Before I talk about that, however, I must mention Maureen McEvoy, a member of the society who has written a commemorative booklet on its history. She is an extraordinary woman—a foster carer and adopter herself.

I will quote from her first experience.

“It is fifty five years since my husband and I approached the Catholic Social Services Centre with the hope of adopting a child. I would like to share a reflection on our first adoption experience. On Monday 1st July 1968 life changed forever for my husband, Jim, and me because that was the day that we brought home our first adopted daughter. We had always hoped to have children, but after years of unsuccessful tests, we decided in 1967 that adoption would be the route to our family. On Tuesday, 25th June 1968, Jim’s birthday, we received a letter telling us about Jenny, who was three months old. We went to see her at her foster family on Wednesday, and then began a hectic whirl of activity. I handed in my notice, and my employers, who knew of our adoption plans, allowed me to leave work on the Friday. Work was hectic as I finished off as much as I could, and handed over the rest of my work to sympathetic colleagues. We had to collect the pram we had ordered, and buy loads of baby paraphernalia, including lots of terry towelling nappies!”

Members might remember those.

“We had been waiting nine months for news of a baby, and had been too worried that it was never going to happen, so had bought very little. There was no paternal leave in those days, and after we got home, buying formula milk on the way, Jim just had time for a cup of tea before going back to his office. No sooner had he gone, than Jenny started crying, and I had to set about her first feed. Boiling the water, mixing the feed, then cooling the bottle seemed to take forever and her wails got louder and louder. I felt a total failure in that first hour.

Both of our families welcomed Jenny into the wider family, and although we had never heard of funnelling in those days, we were very gradual in introducing her to our many family members. Jim’s sister and husband lived in Edinburgh with their five children, and Jenny loved spending time with her cousins.

When I learn now of the phased introductions for adopted children, and hear of continued contact with foster parents, I realise that Jenny’s move to our home was harder for her than it needed to be, and only her sunny nature seemed to make it so easy. No life story book for her—all we got was about ten lines of information and no photos of her before she came to us.

In 1968 babies were placed with families, some straight from hospital, but the birth mother was unable to give full consent for her child to be adopted until three months after giving birth, and she was able to reclaim her child at any time during that period. After three months, adopters could launch a petition to adopt the child, and if the mother changed her mind before the adoption order was granted there had to be a legal hearing to decide the best interests of the child.

Changed times thankfully for birth parents, foster parents and adopters and the children.”

When the agency was established in Edinburgh in 1922, it helped unmarried mums to find homes for their babies, as was the social norm at that

time. Now it helps to find homes for vulnerable children and welcomes adoption and fostering inquiries from all members of the community, including single people, people who follow a faith and people who do not, and members of the LGBTQI+ community, through its offices in Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

In 2010, it entered into a partnership with After Adoption in England and Wales to be its exclusive providers in Scotland of the groundbreaking parenting programme, safebase. The Scottish Government supported the agency to get the initiative off the ground and it has presented courses in many locations throughout Scotland. It also offers courses on Theraplay to all its adopters, to help them to reduce the development gaps that many adopted children have experienced in their early life, because children who are adopted today might very well suffer from the physical effects of parental alcohol or drug addiction.

The centenary event was a delight and heart-warming. It exemplified how far adoption has come. Two parents with their children present told us their stories. One was a single gay male with his adopted teenage son and another a gay male couple who had adopted three siblings: two little girls and a boy. All the children were on their best behaviour and beautifully turned out. The wee girls were in tartan skirts with Aran sweaters and their brother was in matching trews. One of the dads told us how he and his partner had intended to adopt just one child but, when they were introduced to the wee trio, there was only one decision for them. From having no family to having three children was quite a life-changing experience. There were no more exotic holidays or posh restaurants for them—more like burger bars and play areas. As that dad said, he would not change it for the world. Throughout his speech, you could hear his wee family, seated with his partner, encouraging him with cries of “Daddy, daddy.” He was not dry eyed, neither was I and neither was the minister who is now sitting in front of me.

It is appropriate that this debate follows on from the statement that the First Minister made last week, in which she apologised on behalf of us all for the way in which the state treated unwed mothers in past decades, which St Andrew’s Children’s Society fully recognises, and that the debate acknowledges where we and the society are now. I wish the society and all of its foster and adopter parents and their charges well.

15:43

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Christine Grahame for bringing the debate to the chamber. I always welcome the chance to

further the awareness of all forms of care-experienced children and it is a pleasure to speak in the debate today. The importance of understanding the issues that affect care-experienced people is the key to changing many lives for the better. Sadly, we in Scotland have not yet done enough to make that happen.

I also add my congratulations to St Andrew's Children's Society on its centenary, which makes it the oldest adoption and fostering agency in existence in Scotland, as has already been mentioned. During that 100 years, adoption and fostering has changed so much. Practices such as forced adoption are, thankfully, a thing of the past. However, as much as the apology made by the First Minister last week was a great start, so much more needs to be done to fix the on-going problems faced by forced adopters and adult adoptees, and I look forward to working with the new Scottish Government on that.

I applaud St Andrew's Children's Society for its understanding. Any society working in this field for more than 100 years will have seen massive changes to wider societal views, especially on fostering and adopting, and I am delighted that the society provides support for women to help them to cope with the lifelong emotional impact of having a child adopted.

I praise the society for its use of the safebase parenting programme, which is often known as the secure base model. I am sure that members are aware that the Theraplay principles of the safebase programme help adoptive parents to understand the impact of a child's past experiences of trauma and loss.

When my husband and I adopted our daughters, we were given the following analogy for how the brain develops in a child who has experienced attachment issues from early years trauma. Imagine that a mind is being built up like a wall: every brick is a literal building block in the brain's development. If, for example, a baby is not held, emotional and visual responses are not met and that building block is not formed, which creates a gap in the wall. Now, move on in life, building another layer of bricks on the wall. Every brick that is built on top of a gap is built on top of nothing: a literal unstable foundation.

Our daughters came to live with us when they were five and two. Those are very young ages, but, even so, the gaps in their development were obvious. At the age of five, my eldest daughter had such emotional gaps that, for more than a year, I cradled her in my arms like a baby to try to build an emotional and visual connection in the hope of plugging that gap in her development.

Every time that there is trauma or a lack of positive parenting, there is a gap in the wall, and

understanding that is essential to supporting adopted and fostered children through the milestones of their life. Using programmes such as safebase, St Andrew's Children's Society is giving children who are adopted through its agency, and their parents, a strong chance of fixing the wall without it coming tumbling down.

I thank St Andrew's Children's Society for all the work that it does. I heard from some inspiring families at the parliamentary event, which has already been mentioned. Their positive and grateful testimonies are credit, if that were needed, to the support and assistance that the society gives to care-experienced children and their families. To them, I say thank you.

15:47

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Christine Grahame on securing this important debate to mark the centenary of St Andrew's Children's Society, which it celebrated in 2022.

Although it has provided adoption and foster care services since 1922 by ensuring that families are prepared to meet the needs of vulnerable children, the agency has also supported thousands of birth mothers to cope with the loss of a child through adoption. Its staff have striven to show compassion to all the people who have passed through its doors, and they continue to do so, highlighting the essential wider work that the agency carries out. I speak as someone whose grandmother was adopted in very difficult circumstances, albeit in 1905, long before St Andrew's Children's Society came into existence.

With 13,500 children being looked after in Scotland, it is imperative to celebrate when agencies are getting it right. It is also vital to reflect on and learn from the stories of care-experienced children and adults, to improve the services and support that are on offer for both children and their parents.

St Andrew's Children's Society is a brilliant example of an agency getting it right, particularly with its implementation of the safebase parenting programme. It is the only Scottish agency that offers that service, which is a therapeutic programme for parents of adopted or fostered children who have attachment issues. The programme is essential in ensuring that key psychological building blocks—typically developed in the first 18 months of life—are stimulated using play. It is encouraging to see the effectiveness of the programme, which, ultimately, improves the relationship between foster parents and their children and reduces behavioural issues. I encourage the minister to further explore the benefits of the safebase parenting programme and

the possibility of supporting its extension to agencies across Scotland, to ensure that the needs of care-experienced children are met while reducing adoption breakdown.

Foster carers play an intrinsic role in allowing the important work of St Andrew's Children's Society to take place. In Scotland, there are approximately 3,415 approved foster care homes, but there is a shortage of almost 500 foster carers. It is encouraging that the Scottish Government is working with key national and local partners, including the third sector, to identify actions to increase the number of Scots who are willing to foster, and that it provides £145,000 in funding to The Fostering Network each year to raise the profile of foster caring and encourage the recruitment of new carers.

Becoming a foster carer is a significant commitment, and it is essential that local authorities have the funding to provide a fair weekly fostering allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child. However, only one local authority in Scotland, Argyll and Bute Council, pays more than the national minimal allowance in England and Wales across all five age ranges. I therefore urge the minister to consider the implementation of a Scottish minimum allowance to encourage potential foster parents to apply, knowing that they will have the financial support to care for a child. A minimum allowance would ensure that payments would increase in line with inflation, which is particularly important during this cost of living crisis as the prices of food, toiletries, clothing and travel all increase.

It is clear that the Scottish Government is dedicated to ensuring that our care system is developed with care-experienced people at its heart. The independent care review's research into Scotland's care system listened to more than 5,500 people with lived experience to identify where improvements are required. The Promise is built on five key foundations: family, voice, care, people and scaffolding. It recognises that children must be listened to, must stay in homes where they feel safe and loved and should always live with their siblings when it is safe for them to do so; that carers must be supported to develop relationships; and that children and their families should be supported by a system that is there when needed.

In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children should grow up feeling safe and loved. However, it is important to realise that care-experienced children require extra protections.

I again congratulate St Andrew's Children's Society on its centenary and on 100 years of dedicated work to better the lives of care-experienced children and of foster and adoptive

families and to help birth mothers and their families who have been wronged by the adoption system. The work of such agencies across Scotland is essential, and I look forward to seeing improvements being implemented by Scottish ministers to ensure that all our vulnerable children receive the love and safety that they require. I again thank Christine Grahame for bringing this debate to the chamber.

15:51

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a great pleasure, as it almost always is, to follow Kenneth Gibson's contribution. He spoke about the struggle that local authorities have in finding foster parents, which is something that we must do much more work on. In passing, I mention the challenge that exists when different local authorities close to each other offer differing amounts of payment or take different approaches depending on the challenges associated with the young person who is seeking to be fostered. Perhaps that could be looked at.

This is a fascinating day. It is a privilege to take part in this debate, which Christine Grahame has successfully brought to the chamber and which is about an organisation that was 100 years old last year. The organisation has looked on during a time of many changes in Scotland, so it is perhaps fitting that we are having this debate today, given the political change that is happening.

As has been said, the organisation was founded in 1922. It is important to say that it was founded by a group of women, which speaks volumes about women's attitudes to young people, particularly vulnerable children in distress. Over the past 100 years, the organisation's commitment has grown and evolved, but it has unwaveringly been based on helping the most vulnerable children and families.

In 1952, it changed its name to become the Advisory Committee for Social Services. In 1963, it divided into two separate organisations, the Catholic Enquiry Service, which dealt with general social services, and the Catholic Social Service Centre, which dealt solely with adoption and foster care. It is important to say that, although the organisation was founded within the Catholic church, as times changed and attitudes progressed, those within the service felt that they had to step away from the Catholic church in order to continue serving the most vulnerable young people. It was prescient of those who worked in the society at the time that they were happy to make that change.

During the 1950s and 1960s, as has been mentioned, many thousands of children were placed for adoption because of the perception at

the time that a single mother could not provide the care that a married couple could bring. I note that the age of the children was a factor and that, at the time, it was predominantly babies and children under the age of one who were adopted.

Christine Grahame: People said that unwed mothers could not take care of a child, but it was worse than that, because they were looked upon as being disgraceful. It was even harder for them, because they were regarded as bad women.

Martin Whitfield: I am very grateful for that intervention. It is right to note that the focus of the social stigma was not just the young children, but the single mothers.

It is interesting that the records of St Andrew's Children's Society show that a number of single women decided to keep their babies in the face of that adverse approach by the community and that they were supported by the society to make that a success. That speaks volumes. I accept that the number of women was very small, but it is significant that a strong group of women were able to stand up—against their community, but also, frequently, against their families—to do what they thought was best, which was to bring up their child.

As the society progressed, the age of the children whose adoption or fostering was sought changed and the pattern became closer to the one that we recognise today, involving older children and particularly those who have significant needs and require support as they move through fostering but also into adoption. It speaks volumes that St Andrew's Children's Society is able to support families in that regard.

I realise that time is tight, but I want to mention an event that speaks to the strength of the organisation. It occurred in 2015, when Scotland's Adoption Register found itself in trouble at very short notice and, in effect, had to step away from commitments that it had given. Without hesitation or doubt, St Andrew's Children's Society stepped in and agreed to run the register for two years, up to 2017, when other provision could be made.

I congratulate St Andrew's Children's Society on its 100th anniversary. For a century, the organisation has been a shining example of what can be achieved when people come together to support those in need. Like other members, I look forward to a future in which we will redouble our efforts to genuinely build a better world for our children and families across Scotland.

15:57

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): I, too, thank Christine Grahame for initiating this debate, and I thank members

across the chamber for their contributions. The debate has enabled us as a Parliament to congratulate St Andrew's Children's Society on marking its centenary last year. I welcome the opportunity to celebrate that significant milestone and to acknowledge all those who have played a part in the society's important work.

As other speakers have said, there was a parliamentary reception for the society earlier this year. It gave me a chance to offer my congratulations in person and to hear at first hand the experiences of many of those who are involved with the society. The reception was a profoundly moving event, at which a number of people shared personal testimonies about their adoption journeys. We heard from an adoptee who is now a young adult and has become an adoption panel member. We heard from the first single gay man to adopt a child in Scotland, and we heard from a couple who had adopted a sibling group, as Christine Grahame mentioned in her speech. Those people's testimonies and the stories that they shared illustrate the fantastic support that the society has provided for so many years.

However, as Christine Grahame highlights in her motion, the celebration of Scotland's oldest adoption and fostering agency does not just enable us to pay credit to the staff and volunteers who have supported the society over the past 100 years. Importantly, it also enables us to pay credit to adoptive parents and foster carers. I put on the record my sincere thanks to all care givers, including adoptive families, foster carers and practitioners who work in the sectors. We absolutely recognise the vital part that they play in providing nurturing homes, support and love for children and young people across Scotland, and we value the positive difference that that can make to those young people's lives.

Today's debate also enables us to reflect on our work to keep the Promise by 2030. It is vital that the Scottish Government leads from the front to ensure that all care-experienced children and young people are supported to grow up loved, safe and respected.

We stated our commitment to do that in the Promise implementation plan, "Keeping The Promise to our children, young people and families", which was published last year and in which we outlined our vision for delivering a good childhood to ensure that

"Every child lives in a safe and loving home where families are given support to overcome difficulties and stay together."

Our work to keep the Promise includes the whole family wellbeing programme of activity, with investment of £500 million over this parliamentary session. That will transform services to ensure that families, including adoptive and foster families,

can access the support that they need, when and where they need it. We have allocated £50 million in this year's budget, including the provision of £32 million directly to children's services planning partnerships, to enable work at a local level.

We have also provided more than £350,000 in 2022-23 to third sector organisations that provide support at a national level for those who are affected by adoption, including children, young people, families and adult adoptees. That includes: funding for adoption week; a national helpline and support for adoptive families, to minimise adoption breakdowns; the therapeutic education support service in adoption programme—TESSA—which provides therapeutic input for adoptive families; services for professionals and practitioners in the adoption sector; and the adoption contact register for Scotland, which is hosted by Birthlink, to facilitate contact between adoptees, birth parents and birth relatives. We also fund Scotland's adoption register, to support finding a family as easily as possible for children who are identified as needing adoptive placements.

As the former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon mentioned in the national apology that she made last week, we are also funding a scoping study to look at what support is required for those who have been affected by historical adoption practices, including adult adoptees.

St Andrew's Children's Society's work extends beyond adoption, so I will briefly also mention foster care. We are absolutely committed to helping foster carers. We provide a range of specific support, which includes more than £150,000 to the Fostering Network in Scotland this year. That funding supports the Fosterline Scotland service, training for foster carers, the raising of the profile of foster caring and the encouragement of the recruitment of new carers.

I reassure the Parliament that delivering a Scottish recommended allowance for foster and kinship carers as soon as possible is a priority for me. That has taken far longer than we originally anticipated, and I recognise the frustrations of care givers and other stakeholders. I remain committed to working constructively with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to deliver it as quickly as possible; we are exploring all available options for doing that.

More broadly, the foundation of all our work is in getting it right for every child—GIRFEC, as it is known—which is the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring that all children and young people and their families are offered the right support at the right time, so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential. Through the national trauma training programme, we continue work to ensure that our

workforce is trauma informed, recognises the impact of adverse experiences on children and provides the right support to ensure that no further harm is done.

Although today's debate is an important opportunity to reflect on our collective work to keep the Promise, I return to the celebration that is at the heart of the motion and again extend my congratulations to St Andrew's Children's Society on its centenary.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate, and I close this meeting of the Parliament.

Meeting closed at 16:03.

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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