



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 18 June 2025**

**Session 6**



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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 June 2025

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands. I advise members that there is quite a bit of interest in supplementary questions, so I will require brevity in questions and responses as far as possible.

#### Marine Fund Scotland 2025-26

**1. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its marine fund Scotland 2025-26 will support businesses and organisations in coastal communities. (S6O-04800)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The marine fund Scotland is now open for this year's applications, with £14 million of support available. I urge all those who have ideas for projects that will help marine industries to evolve and flourish to apply.

Since 2021, the marine fund Scotland has awarded more than £55 million in grants to 330 projects, facilitating £121 million of investment. With that funding, the Scottish Government is backing our marine economy, which is crucial to the economic, social and cultural fabric of our rural, coastal and island communities.

**Audrey Nicoll:** By how much have Scotland's coastal communities been short-changed since Brexit, when we left the European Union? Is there any indication that the current United Kingdom Government is interested in giving Scotland its rightful share of marine funding?

**Mairi Gougeon:** We can look at nations that are in the EU right now to see what we could be getting if we were still in the EU. For example, Denmark is receiving funding through the EU's new European maritime fisheries and aquaculture fund. Denmark has a smaller sea area and marine sector than Scotland, yet it is receiving multiyear funding that is the equivalent of about £25 million per year. We can compare that with the £14 million-worth of funding that we currently receive from the UK Government.

The UK Government recently announced a new £360 million fishing and coastal growth fund. We are calling for a rightful share of that budget to be devolved and allocated to Scotland. I have pressed the UK Government for confirmation of that, but I have not yet received a reply. I share stakeholders' frustrations that the UK Government did not engage with devolved nations or industry before announcing that new fund. If it is not devolved, it risks duplicating current funding programmes, causing confusion for stakeholders and diluting its intended benefits.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary set out how she could use the marine fund Scotland 2025-26 to support the sustainable management and potential reopening of the Solway cockle fishery? Will she also set out how she expects projects to be successful and to deliver long-term value when applicants may not receive confirmation of funding until late October, yet all work must be completed and expended by the end of March? That is a window of just five months, which makes a summer survey this year without other support impossible. Will the cabinet secretary agree to meet me and stakeholders?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I encourage anyone with an interest to apply to the fund. I know that officials will be working at pace to process the applications to ensure that there is a good chance of the money being fully utilised. On Finlay Carson's last point, I am more than happy to have a meeting. I will be in touch to make those arrangements.

#### Livestock Culling and Meat Consumption

**2. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I apologise for my late arrival to the chamber.

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether policies such as culling livestock and promoting less meat consumption could have a detrimental impact on the rural economy. (S6O-04801)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The Scottish Government does not have any policy on culling livestock or mandating reductions in meat consumption. We recognise the vital role that livestock farming plays in supporting rural economies, food security and Scotland's cultural and natural heritage. Our approach is to support farmers and crofters to produce high-quality food sustainably. Meat is a good source of protein with a number of micronutrients and can be enjoyed as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

**Stephen Kerr:** I seek further confirmation from the minister on the policy position that he just mentioned. The United Kingdom Climate Change Committee has said that nearly half of the emissions reductions in Scotland by 2035 will

come from cutting livestock numbers by 26 per cent.

We are already seeing the impact of such measures and that direction of travel with the closure of the Scotbeef abattoir in Inverurie, which is costing 90 jobs. At this rate, it will not be net zero emissions by 2045; it will be net zero jobs.

Will the minister confirm—yes or no—whether the livestock cuts that the Climate Change Committee mentions are official Government policy?

**Jim Fairlie:** No, they are not official Government policy. The CCC's advice is exactly that: advice. We will be setting out our response to that advice imminently. However, let me be crystal clear: we intend to meet our net zero commitments in a way that supports our vital agricultural sector and our wider rural economy. Our livestock sector is a critical part of that, and this Government has no policy to reduce livestock.

We provide direct support to livestock farmers—and are the only part of the UK to do so. An example of that is the Scottish suckler beef calf scheme, which pays £40 million a year directly into farmers' pockets.

### **New Transmission Infrastructure (Discussions with Agricultural Organisations)**

**3. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with agricultural organisations regarding any increases in production costs as a result of new transmission infrastructure. (S6O-04802)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The Scottish Government has not had any discussions with agricultural organisations on potential changes to production costs as a result of new transmission infrastructure.

Applications for new transmission infrastructure are made under the Electricity Act 1989, which includes provisions to ensure that landowners receive fair compensation where land, or rights over land, are acquired by compulsion for the development of energy infrastructure, with established legal frameworks and dispute resolution mechanisms available through the court system.

**Tess White:** That is deeply disappointing for farmers. Following my question in April on the loss of agricultural land to the development of overhead transmission lines, Jim Fairlie had to write to the Presiding Officer admitting that he had got his answer badly wrong. It is painfully clear that the Scottish National Party Government does not understand the impact of energy consenting

decisions on rural communities. Farmers will be listening with despair.

Does the minister agree that net zero should not be achieved at the expense of farmers' livelihoods and—*[Interruption.]*—the SNP Government must urgently establish the impact that new transmission infrastructure will have on the agricultural sector?

**Jim Fairlie:** I lost the second part of Tess White's question because of the noise from her colleagues. If I heard some of that correctly, I think that her main point is that the Scottish Government favours net zero over farming. That is simply not the case. We have shown time and again that we are working with our farming community, and we want to ensure that we achieve net zero by it working with us.

### **Gull Management (Eyemouth)**

**4. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many licences for gull management were awarded in Eyemouth for 2025. (S6O-04803)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** NatureScot has received four applications to manage gulls to protect public health and safety in Eyemouth this year, and three licences have been issued. One licence was refused, and NatureScot has met that applicant and is working with them on the details of their application.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Despite acknowledging that aggressive seagulls are a health and safety issue, NatureScot originally refused to grant any gull management licences to businesses in Eyemouth. Instead, it told my constituents to use dogs. However, within 24 hours, NatureScot U-turned and granted two of the licence applications, apologising for the way in which those applications were handled. Will the minister, too, apologise to my constituents, who have described the gull licensing process as "soul destroying"? Does he endorse NatureScot's ridiculous suggestion to use dogs in a rooftop seagull sniffer pawtrol? If so, should my constituents be training spaniels to scale scaffolding, attaching Labradors to drones or giving parachutes to poodles?

**Jim Fairlie:** We recognise that it is an issue for people, so the tone in which Rachael Hamilton has just approached that question is rather disappointing. We also recognise that, when NatureScot has got it wrong, it has rectified that, which the member has clearly demonstrated. If NatureScot is going to apologise to her constituents, that is up to NatureScot to do.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will you?

**Jim Fairlie:** If NatureScot is going to apologise to her constituents, that is up to it to do.

On what we are doing with regard to licences for seagull management, I have had conversations with Douglas Ross, Fergus Ewing and many others on the issue, and we accept that there are issues with seagulls that are causing problems for people living in certain areas. That is why I am hosting a seagull summit later in the year, in the north. It will be in Inverness or Nairn, or somewhere in that area, but that has not been decided yet. When we have that summit, we will discuss what happens with seagulls in urban populations right across the country.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** From Eyemouth to Elgin, people are being attacked by gulls, but NatureScot does not record any of those instances. Does the minister believe that NatureScot should record that information and take cognisance of it when it approves or rejects licence applications?

**Jim Fairlie:** That is a fair point. If Mr Ross wants me to put that on the record with NatureScot, I will certainly do so when I have discussions with it. The purpose of getting a licence is to deal with seagulls that are causing health and safety issues—that is already in the licensing application process. I am happy to take on board Mr Ross's point. When we discuss further how to protect people from marauding seagulls, we will take that into account.

### Food and Drink Export Statistics

**5. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the latest export statistics for Scotland's food and drink sector. (S6O-04804)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** Scottish food and drink exports remain a cornerstone of the economy and were valued at £7.5 billion in 2024. The latest figures from HM Revenue and Customs, which are for the first quarter of 2025, highlight a positive outlook, with a rise of 5.1 per cent compared with the same period last year.

The Scottish Government is committed to helping the sector with its exporting ambitions. Since 2014, we have invested more than £7 million in the food and drink industry export plan and in supporting market growth through a network of global specialists. A new six-point export plan has recently been announced to further support businesses, including those in the food and drink sector, in expanding their international reach.

**Annabelle Ewing:** Although the Scottish food and drink sector undoubtedly punches above its weight—I welcome the latest figures on that—

there must nonetheless be opportunities to grow the export market. In that regard, one clear structural barrier is the lack of a direct ferry for freight to continental Europe. Given the cabinet secretary's interest as champion of Scotland's food and drink sector, will she raise the issue with the Deputy First Minister, whom I have already met on the matter, and with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, with whom I have corresponded on it, to finally get the Rosyth to Dunkirk ferry proposal over the line?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Annabelle Ewing raises a really important point. Scottish ministers of course want Scotland's sea connections with Europe to be enhanced. I know that the Deputy First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport have met the project sponsors regarding the Rosyth to Dunkirk ferry proposal to highlight that support and to offer more practical advice.

The recently announced sanitary and phytosanitary—SPS—agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union, which the Scottish Government had long been calling for, is expected to remove some of the barriers that our exporters have faced since Brexit and that have compromised the viability of projects such as the Rosyth to Dunkirk ferry. The ball is now in the UK Government's court to get the SPS agreement over the line, but I assure the member that engagement between our officials is still very much on-going.

**Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** It is, of course, great to see Scotland's wonderful produce doing so well in export markets. The sector is a major employer that accounts for 10 per cent of jobs in areas such as the Highlands and Islands. However, there are recruitment challenges in the sector. Although short-term factors are undoubtedly involved in that, we must also plan for the future. The Royal Highland Show is just round the corner, and it will surely have a focus on rural skills and jobs. What more can the cabinet secretary do to promote jobs in the food and drink sector as a career choice?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Tim Eagle raises an important point. We want a thriving food and drink sector, because it is important for our economy. Not that long ago, we had a session in Parliament with our wider food and drink industry, which was focused specifically on skills and seeing what more we can do on that. Some really great programmes are being undertaken in our agriculture sector. For example, there is the work that Ringlink Scotland and the machinery rings are doing to get younger people into the industry. A whole host of work is going on.

I am more than happy to have further discussions with Tim Eagle. I look forward to catching up with him at the Royal Highland Show,

as I no doubt will, and engaging in more such discussions in the next few days.

### **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Bird Species)**

**6. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it anticipates that NatureScot will complete its review of the bird species in schedule 2 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. (S6O-04805)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The review of species that are listed in schedule 2 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has been completed by NatureScot. The Scottish Government is currently considering the findings from the review and will provide an update on the next steps in due course.

**David Torrance:** Our approach to environmental issues has changed enormously since 1981, and it is only right that legislation is considered periodically to determine whether it needs to be replaced or amended. The Scottish Government has the powers to prohibit the hunting of ptarmigan while a lengthy process takes its course. Will the minister clarify whether that approach has been considered?

**Jim Fairlie:** I appreciate the concerns that David Torrance has raised about the review's timescales. However, good governance requires that consideration be given to the full range of evidence that relates to all red and amber-listed species that are listed in schedule 2 to the 1981 act. Land management practices such as habitat improvement and predator control can have benefits for red-listed bird species in certain circumstances, and we want to ensure that the schedule 2 changes do not lead to unintended consequences.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** When the minister considers the review, will he also commit to considering full cost recovery from licence applicants so that the public no longer subsidise private interests when licences are granted for the killing of protected species?

**Jim Fairlie:** As I have outlined to members, we are reviewing the piece of work that has been done and we will publish the review when the time comes.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I have been made aware of a potential release of non-native game birds in Shetland. Islands are more sensitive to the establishment of non-native species, which can impact the environment and compete with native species. Will the minister work with NatureScot to increase awareness of the importance of not bringing in or releasing non-native species in islands? Will he also consider

legislative measures to restrict non-native game bird releases?

**Jim Fairlie:** Beatrice Wishart has raised a very specific point, which I do not have access to information on. If she writes to me, I will be more than happy to look at the issue and get back to her.

### **Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 (Farming and Food Production in Ayrshire)**

**7. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any progress with the provisions in the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024, including how they may affect farming and food production in Ayrshire. (S6O-04806)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 will commence on 16 June, which will provide the powers to introduce the future support framework that was consulted on and enable payments to be made under the four tiers. We remain committed to direct payments, and the act provides flexibility to deliver them throughout changing circumstances while realising our vision for agriculture and delivering on our commitment to support agriculture and rural communities. As the act requires, the rural support plan will set out how support will deliver on the act's objectives and the Scottish Government's wider priorities over a five-year period starting from 2026.

**Willie Coffey:** As the minister knows, we are very proud of the wonderful food offerings that we have across Ayrshire, many of which I have mentioned in the chamber before. One of our hopes is to see such products on local supermarket shelves much more often, so that local people can easily identify and buy locally produced food in order to support our producers. Will the 2024 act help to encourage that? Will the minister update Parliament on how he is engaging with the sector to improve the position on that?

**Jim Fairlie:** I absolutely take on board Willie Coffey's point. He has been a very strong advocate for his constituency. We have committed £15 million over 2023 to 2026 to support the delivery of Scotland's food and drink strategy, which is sustaining Scotland and supplying the world. That funding facilitates a range of activities and direct engagement with grocery retailers in order to help to increase the volume of Scottish food and drink on our retail shelves. Additionally, we work closely with the Scottish Grocers Federation and support its go local campaign, which is helping to transform convenience stores with dedicated display spaces for local produce.



## Venison in Catering (Support for Public Bodies)

### 8. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government, as part of its policies on managing deer numbers, how it is supporting public bodies such as local authorities and national health service boards to use more Scottish venison in any catering that they are responsible for. (S6O-04807)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** I thank Roz McCall for that question because it allows me to put on the record that, although menu content will be decided locally, much Scottish Government work is under way to facilitate the uptake of venison across the public sector. That includes a successful pilot with Wild Jura Venison, Argyll and Bute Council and Food for Life to supply venison in six primary schools. Officials are working collaboratively to explore opportunities to increase demand for venison and develop options to increase supply by helping the sector to make the most of the various routes to market through approaches such as wholesale and framework agreements, which are widely used across the public sector.

**Roz McCall:** I listened intently to the minister's answer, but data following a freedom of information request indicates that public bodies tend not to include venison in pupil and patient meals. The nutritional benefits of venison have been emphasised by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, which teaches schoolchildren about venison at its hill-to-grill educational events. In an effort to improve deer management and make good use of quality meat, Perthshire-based Glenkilrie Larder participates in a project that involves venison being donated to local schools and food banks.

At a critical point in the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill's passage through the Parliament, what additional steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure that this healthy, low-fat meat appears on school and hospital menus across the nation?

**Jim Fairlie:** Roz McCall raises a very good point. I would like to correct her on one issue—I think that Finlay Carson has said to me previously that his local authority supplies venison. However, she is absolutely right to make her point. We need to stop looking at deer management as a problem; we should embrace it and add venison to our natural larder. The Scottish Government is committed to doing that.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** As a high-protein sustainable food source, Scottish venison should be available to everyone. However, I have heard reports of land managers burying deer rather than allowing them to be

processed to feed the nation. What action is the Scottish Government taking to prevent wealthy landowners from blocking venison for the many?

**Jim Fairlie:** I do not accept the premise of that question. We are going through vital deer management processes to allow us to restore nature and reduce damage to habitats. As I said, deer are not a problem species; they are part of our natural heritage. We should be able to put venison into our public food processing and our larders so that we can all enjoy it.

## Health and Social Care

### Recruitment by Care Home Providers (Brexit)

1. **Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what proportion of care home providers have reported recruitment difficulties since the United Kingdom left the European Union. (S6O-04808)

**The Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing (Tom Arthur):** In 2018, the Scottish Government published a report on the contribution of EU workers in the social care workforce, and that process was repeated for comparison in 2022. In 2018, 37.9 per cent of care home provider respondents reported experiencing difficulty in recruiting staff. That figure increased to 75 per cent in the 2022 report. Compounding those difficulties, in 2022, respondents across all services reported a drop in the number of applications from EU nationals. Although it is difficult to disentangle the impact of Brexit from other pressures on the social care labour market, the 2022 report found that Brexit is among the factors that are resulting in the sector having less flexibility to respond to on-going labour supply challenges.

**Gordon MacDonald:** The Labour Government's changes to visa regulations, including those relating to salary thresholds, visa fees and sponsor licences, have created chronic staff shortages. What discussions have Scottish Government ministers had with their UK counterparts regarding caring roles being added to the shortage occupation list in order to ease visa restrictions?

**Tom Arthur:** Gordon MacDonald is correct that the UK Labour Government's plans to end international recruitment of care workers will have a profoundly negative and potentially catastrophic impact on the social care sector. We have tried to engage with the UK Government by providing clear evidence-based proposals outlining workable adjustments that would better support Scotland's labour market without compromising the UK Government's broader objectives. However, Labour's immigration white paper shows no

substantive recognition of the policy proposals that the Scottish Government submitted.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Question 2 is from Kevin Stewart, who joins us remotely.

**NHS Grampian (NHS Scotland National Performance Framework)**

**2. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it has taken to support NHS Grampian since it was escalated to stage 4 of NHS Scotland's national performance framework for finance, leadership and governance. (S6O-04809)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** My officials continue to work closely with NHS Grampian daily, and the Government remains committed to providing the health board with the support that it needs to stabilise and sustainably improve.

One of the initial stages of the escalation is the whole-system diagnostic that we have commissioned, which involves KPMG reviewing key areas of NHS Grampian activity. We expect the initial findings of the review to be available by mid-July. In turn, that will inform a tailored package of support and the agreement of an improvement plan for NHS Grampian, with detailed actions and timescales.

**Kevin Stewart:** A key thing that I have concerns about is the additional bureaucracies that NHS Grampian has put in place. One way of solving difficulties and getting the board back on track is to listen to the front-line staff who feel ignored. Will the work that is being undertaken involve communicating with and, more importantly, listening to front-line staff, who often have the ability to resolve some of the difficulties that exist?

**Neil Gray:** Yes, it absolutely will. I acknowledge, welcome and appreciate the work that Mr Stewart has consistently done to represent the interests of local staff, as well as patients. I agree that meaningful partnership working will be key in the successful development and implementation of NHS Grampian's improvement plan.

The board must work closely with its staff and trade union and professional organisation representatives in its area partnership forum. It must ensure that it listens and responds to concerns that staff raise and that staff views inform future activity. Similarly, we expect the meaningful engagement of local clinical views, not least through the health board's area clinical forum.

The Government's assurance board will look for evidence of meaningful partnership working in the

development and implementation of NHS Grampian's improvement plan, so that we can benefit from front-line staff's ability to see a way to navigate through the challenges, as Mr Stewart has rightly pointed out.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Swingeing cuts in NHS Grampian will decimate as many as 79 services for patients, including a vital X-ray facility at Kincardine community hospital. In a bid to cut down overtime pay, face-to-face appointments that are deemed unnecessary could soon stop. That is a crisis of the Scottish National Party's making, due to years of underfunding. It is clear that balance sheets are being prioritised over vulnerable patients. Will the cabinet secretary tell my constituents how long this dire situation will go on?

**Neil Gray:** I expect NHS Grampian and all boards to take proportionate decisions that ensure that service delivery is financially sustainable, as well as sustainable in relation to what patients can expect to receive from those who provide services.

NHS Grampian is in a particularly acute position, which is why it has been escalated through the framework—not in a punitive way but in a way that provides support. The work that the Government and KPMG will provide to the board is expected to ensure that options are available to protect patient-facing services and to enhance the performance of NHS Grampian so that its patients can feel the benefit.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Ambulances are a lifeline at a time of desperate need, but figures show that, so far in 2025, more than half of all ambulances in Scotland have been stuck on hospital forecourts for more than 45 minutes. In one of those was my constituent, who, after having had a stroke, spent seven hours overnight in a sweltering ambulance, with no food or drink, waiting for a bed in the Aberdeen royal infirmary. A spokesperson for NHS Grampian said that that was regrettable and apologised, but the fact remains that it is an institution at stage 4 that is facing sustained pressure and has the lowest number of beds per head of population in the country. What is the minister doing to support NHS Grampian to increase capacity?

**Neil Gray:** The situation that Mercedes Villalba recounts is not only regrettable but unacceptable. That is an example of why we have escalated NHS Grampian to stage 4 of the escalation framework, so that we can provide additional assistance for it to improve its unscheduled care pathway. We recognise the difficulty in ambulance turnaround times at Aberdeen royal infirmary, which was part of the reason for the critical incident that took place before Christmas.

Everything that we are doing is to support a better flow of patients through the system, including through enhanced frailty services in the ARI, the call before convey work that the Scottish Ambulance Service is doing and an escalation in hospital-at-home services. The work in all those areas is to alleviate pressure on unscheduled care pathways so that the experience of Mercedes Villalba's constituent does not happen to others.

### Patient Transport (Eskdale)

**3. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that residents in Eskdale can access patient transport for hospital appointments. (S6O-04810)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** In October 2024, the Scottish Government published the transport to health delivery plan, which sets out commitments in relation to transport and healthcare across the work of the health and social care directorate and Transport Scotland. Through that plan, we will continue to work with national health service boards to re-emphasise the need for them to consider patient access as part of the care pathway. The plan also recognises that collaborative working among NHS boards, regional transport partnerships and other partners, such as community transport providers, is absolutely necessary in service planning and decision making, and that it helps to address patients having to travel longer distances to access healthcare.

**Oliver Mundell:** Langholm is one of the places that the Scottish Government should start with. A recent public meeting saw more than 300 people crowd into the Buccleuch centre there, and one of the top issues that they raised was their difficulty in getting to Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary in Dumfries. In a best-case scenario, the journey involves a round trip of six buses and takes more than four hours. That is not realistic for the elderly, the sick and those who are unable to drive. Given what the cabinet secretary has said, does he recognise that that is an unfair ask? Will he raise these concerns with the health board and ensure that alternative arrangements are put in place? For example, could the use of technology be increased, could some clinics be re-established at Thomas Hope hospital, and could more use be made of services at Carlisle hospital, as was the case in the past?

**Neil Gray:** I very much appreciate Oliver Mundell raising this issue on behalf of his constituents and his tenor in doing so. As I come from an island community, I recognise that travelling for healthcare and other services is a challenge and is often necessary, but we want to

minimise the level of challenge and make services as accessible as possible. Following Oliver Mundell's representation, I will, of course, raise that concern with NHS Dumfries and Galloway and explore the alternative options that he has set out.

Yesterday, the Scottish Government set out the service renewal framework, which is about shifting the balance of care and using innovation and technology to provide people with more equitable access to services. The points that Oliver Mundell raises therefore very much align with our policy direction.

### NHS Dentistry (Dumfries and Galloway)

**4. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that nearly 40 per cent of adults in Dumfries and Galloway are not registered with a national health service dentist. (S6O-04811)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** In recognition of the particularly challenging circumstances in Dumfries and Galloway, the Scottish Government will continue to provide additional financial assistance to the local health board in 2025-26, including to deliver additional evening clinics for unregistered priority patients. My officials also continue to work closely with the health board, and they meet the director of dentistry regularly.

**Colin Smyth:** The reality is that the registration rate is not just the lowest in the country; it is getting worse. Nearly 3,000 fewer adults are registered than there were at this time last year, so it is pretty clear that the Government's current approach is simply not working. Does the minister recognise that, had the Government acted on the warnings from NHS Dumfries and Galloway, more than five years ago, that a crisis was looming, my constituents would not have had to go private to get dental healthcare? Given that the actions of the Government are clearly not working, what more does it plan to do, and when will that start to have an impact?

**Jenni Minto:** As I said in my earlier answer, I recognise that there are issues in Dumfries and Galloway, and the Government is currently working closely with the health board on them. The situation that Mr Smyth describes is occurring not just within Scotland but across the four nations of the United Kingdom. I have been working closely with my counterparts and with the directors of dentistry across each of those nations to ensure that we can reach a four-country solution. We need to improve the pipeline of dentists coming into the country and ensure that those who are in Scotland after training in other countries have the right UK training to allow them to step up to become dentists here. In line with this year's

programme for government, we have increased dentistry funding by 15 per cent, which is the highest-ever proportional increase for the sector. We are also working closely with rural boards to ensure that specific payments that are intended to encourage dentists to move to rural and island locations are more targeted.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Elena Whitham has a supplementary question—hopefully with reference to the question, which of course concerns access to NHS dentistry in Dumfries and Galloway.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** As the minister has touched on, increasing the dental workforce plays a crucial role in improving access to NHS dentistry, in Dumfries and Galloway and across all our rural areas more widely. Can the minister say more about the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support the dental workforce pipeline, especially in rural areas, where the need is acute, with far too many of our constituents travelling extensively to secure treatment, oftentimes when they are in pain?

**Jenni Minto:** The Scottish Government's operational improvement plan sets out a package of actions to improve the NHS dental workforce now and into the future, in Dumfries and Galloway and across Scotland. As I have said, it is being supported by additional funding in 2025-26. Alongside that, we are working with NHS boards to refine the financial incentives that are in place to support dentists in moving to work in rural areas, thus supporting sustainable access across Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a supplementary from Finlay Carson. Again, it should be with reference to Dumfries and Galloway.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Can the minister state whether access to NHS dentists has been getting better or worse since the Government's additional funding was made available?

**Jenni Minto:** I would like to report—if I can find this in my notes—that Public Health Scotland statistics published in May show that more than 4.2 million courses of treatment were delivered to patients in the 2024-25 financial year—

**Finlay Carson:** This is not about Dumfries and Galloway.

**Jenni Minto:** More than 1 million patients were seen by NHS dentists in the quarter ending March 2025. As I have indicated, I recognise that we have—

**Finlay Carson:** Is that up or down?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members, could we let the minister respond? I think that she is getting on to Dumfries and Galloway.

**Jenni Minto:** As I have indicated, I recognise that there are issues in Dumfries and Galloway—

**Finlay Carson:** Is it better or worse?

**Jenni Minto:** —and we are doing what we can to improve access to dentistry across the region.

### **General Practitioner Waiting Times (NHS Grampian)**

**5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what urgent action it is taking to address general practitioner waiting times in NHS Grampian, in light of reports of on-going staffing shortages, delayed discharges and critical incidents. (S6O-04812)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** I want to make it easier for people to see their GPs, and I am taking steps to address the challenges that general practice faces. That includes ensuring that a greater proportion of new national health service funding goes to primary and community care. GPs play an incredibly important role, and we want to see more of them in Scotland. That is why we are determined to increase the number of GPs by 800 by 2027, with an additional 360 GPs having been added since 2017. As of 11 November 2024, the GP specialty training establishment in Scotland stands at just over 1,200 places, which is a record level.

**Douglas Lumsden:** A number of constituents have contacted me regarding their inability to get GP appointments within a reasonable timescale. Last week, NHS Grampian announced £23 million-worth of spending cuts, which will mean stopping certain face-to-face appointments and giving routine test results only over the phone or by letter. What steps are being taken to improve long-term workforce planning for medical services in places such as Inverurie, to ensure sustainable staffing levels and continuity of care for local patients?

**Neil Gray:** I reiterate to Douglas Lumsden the point that I made in my first answer: that we have a record GP training establishment in Scotland, which currently sits at 1,200 places. We have more to do to ensure that trainees are able to get into employment, and we are working with the British Medical Association's general practice committee on finding a sustainable route through the funding pressures, which are hindering the employment of GPs in Scotland.

I point Mr Lumsden to the Scottish graduate entry medicine programme—ScotGEM—which

specifically covers rural medical degrees, to ensure that doctors coming through the system have rural medical training so that we can support rural communities that need access to general practitioners here in Scotland.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** GPs are very much at the heart of our health system, so it is vital that we move forward with work to increase timely access. Can the cabinet secretary advise how the steps that are outlined in the programme for government will build on the Scottish Government's work to improve GP waiting times in NHS Grampian?

**Neil Gray:** I very much recognise, and am grateful for, Audrey Nicoll's point about improving access to general practice. I recognise that too many of our constituents are feeling that frustration. The steps that we have outlined in the programme for government include enabling 100,000 enhanced GP appointments for patients who have key risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar, obesity and smoking, and who are not currently being treated. That is a new investment in general practice as we look to shift more care to the community in a more preventative way, which is the subject of the service renewal framework and the population health framework, both of which were published this week.

More investment will help to sustain general practice and ensure that patients can access services locally, and we are working with the BMA to bring that forward. That is alongside the expansion of pharmacy first services, through which, for many ailments, pharmacies are the recommended first port of call for patients.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** Campaign groups from NHS Grampian right down to my own South Scotland region believe that there is a shortfall of as many as 1,800 GPs, and that that number is a more realistic target if the Government hopes to meet its ambition of achieving better-quality care that is closer to home.

Our health service is crying out for more GPs, yet a cut in GP funding means that practices are unable to recruit the staff that they desperately need. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that although the training of medical students is important, it does not help matters when students are unable to get employment after graduation?

**Neil Gray:** I very much recognise the view expressed in Carol Mochan's final point. That is why we are increasing our investment in general practice. We remain committed to increasing the number of GPs in Scotland by 800 by 2027. GP headcount has been consistently at more than

5,000, and the number of GPs has increased by 360 since 2017. This year, we are investing more than £2.6 million in a range of measures to support GPs to remain in the workplace.

We are also making good progress against our GP recruitment and retention plan, and we have established a national framework to support the development of early career fellowships. NHS Education for Scotland has completed its review of the GP retainer scheme, which will be open to new entrants from August this year.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** In my question in response to the cabinet secretary's statement yesterday, I mentioned the constructive meeting that I had with Dr Robert Lockhart from Elgin and his colleagues. Although the cabinet secretary gave me a positive response yesterday, he did not answer the specific points that I raised. I therefore ask him again: what percentage of the health budget is currently spent on general practice, and what percentage does he believe should be spent on it to allow GPs to deliver all the services that they believe they can?

**Neil Gray:** I recognise that the BMA has set out its position that the percentage of the NHS budget that goes into general practice is not sufficient. That is why we are working with the BMA to increase the investment going into general practice. As I said in response to Carol Mochan, we have already increased general practice funding this year.

Further initiatives have come through the budget and through the programme for government, including the additional cardiovascular enhanced services that we negotiated with the BMA. However, I recognise Douglas Ross's point that, if we are to truly shift the balance of care, we need to shift the balance of resource. I am currently working with the BMA in order to achieve just that.

### **NHS Tayside (Infrastructure)**

**6. Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will support NHS Tayside to improve its physical infrastructure to help to deliver better health outcomes. (S6O-04813)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** The Scottish Government has increased NHS Tayside's formula capital by 5 per cent for essential maintenance and equipment replacement. We have also approved projects to progress with multiyear essential maintenance upgrades for electrical and ventilation systems at Ninewells hospital and Perth royal infirmary, which will require more than £60 million of investment.

Over the next two years, we will also provide £12 million of capital funding to take over the lease of four general practitioner practices, which are

Comrie medical centre, Stanley medical practice, Arthursstone medical centre and Nethergate medical practice.

We are also working with all health boards to develop a whole-system national health service infrastructure investment plan, and we will shortly be asking NHS Tayside to identify its three strategic capital priorities.

**Maurice Golden:** Ninewells hospital has served the people of Dundee for more than 50 years, but the difficulty and costs of maintaining the ageing building are growing. That raises the question whether Tayside would be better served by a new hospital. Will the cabinet secretary conduct a review that compares the cost-effectiveness of continued maintenance versus a new facility?

**Neil Gray:** I refer back to the conclusion of my first answer to Maurice Golden, when I said that we will be asking NHS Tayside to identify its three strategic capital priorities. That is the review that he is asking for, and it will inform the whole-system NHS infrastructure investment plan. We will await its priorities with interest.

#### **NHS Lothian (Education and Tutoring for Sick Children)**

**7. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the health secretary has had with ministerial colleagues and NHS Lothian regarding the provision of education and tutoring for sick children at the Royal hospital for children and young people in Edinburgh and other national health service facilities and services. (S6O-04814)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** Section 14 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 places a statutory duty on local authorities to make special arrangements for any child or young person who is absent from school for a prolonged period, due to ill health, to enable them to continue their education while they are away from their regular school.

I confirm that officials have discussed the matter with the City of Edinburgh Council. NHS Lothian and the City of Edinburgh Council recognise their responsibilities under the statutory duty, and they have set up the Little France teaching centre within the hospital. The centre uses teachers who are employed by the council, and that service is available for all children and young people during their stay in the hospital.

**Craig Hoy:** The minister should be aware of the case involving Lawrence, a constituent of mine who suffers from leukaemia. Lawrence experienced the distress of watching other children on his ward receive education from the City of Edinburgh Council's hospital schooling service at the sick kids hospital, while he was

denied it because he attends a school in the independent sector, and his parents could not pay the £115 an hour that the council charges in such circumstances.

Since I raised Lawrence's case, more parents have been in touch with me—and with bodies that represent independent schools—to highlight similar injustices. Several cases involve children with a disability being refused access to specialist equipment, such as aids for hearing impairment, or having it withdrawn, because they attend independent schools.

Will the minister commit to working urgently with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, councils, the independent schools sector and NHS boards to reach a resolution that ends that unjust discrimination against sick and disabled children in Scotland?

**Jenni Minto:** In response to Mr Hoy's follow-up question, I was aware of the situation involving his constituent Lawrence. As I believe that Ms Gilruth said when Mr Hoy previously raised the issue, ultimately, the decision is one for her to take. However, I am very happy to work with her to address the situation from a health perspective.

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I have been contacted by constituents who share Mr Hoy's concern about the issue. Councillors say that the policy regarding learning for sick children who attend independent schools is based on Scottish Government guidance, which places the duty for such tuition on independent schools. It is clear that there has been miscommunication. What effort is the Scottish Government making to inform parents, schools and health boards of that policy?

**Jenni Minto:** Foysoyl Choudhury is right. Although the Scottish Government has provided national guidance on the continued responsibility to provide education while a child or young person is unable to attend school due to ill health, decisions about the fees to be charged for hospital education services are a matter for local authorities and NHS boards to consider, along with independent schools, as appropriate.

As I have just said in response to Mr Hoy, I am very happy to work with Ms Gilruth from a health perspective to ensure that we find a solution to the situation.

#### **Rapid Cancer Diagnostic Services (Eligibility Criteria)**

**8. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the eligibility criteria for rapid cancer diagnostic services, including the rationale for them usually only being available to those over the age of 18, in light of any unique challenges faced

by children and young people being diagnosed with cancer. (S6O-04815)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** Rapid cancer diagnostic services provide primary care with access to a fast-track diagnostic pathway for non-specific symptoms suspicious of cancer, such as weight loss and fatigue. All RCDSs and non-specific cancer pathways across the UK have similar, clinically agreed criteria for referral.

There are specific and well-established referral guidelines for children and young people as part of the Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer, which have recently been clinically reviewed. The updated guidelines will be published in July. That will be supported by the provision of education resources to support primary care to make the most appropriate referral to the most appropriate pathway.

**Miles Briggs:** Even though cancer is the leading cause of disease-related death in children and young people under the age of 25, members of that group often face significant barriers to a timely cancer diagnosis, either because of misdiagnosis or because they have exhibited vague or non-specific symptoms. They often have to visit their general practitioner or other health providers multiple times before being referred and diagnosed.

Despite those challenges, Scottish Government initiatives to support early diagnosis, such as rapid diagnostic centres, are typically focused on older Scots and adults rather than on children and young people. Given the clear need for earlier and more accurate diagnosis of people in that age group, what action is the Government taking to address that gap?

**Jenni Minto:** I thank Miles Briggs for bringing that important issue to the chamber. Clearly, we need a separation between adult and paediatric services. To that end, in September 2021, we launched "Collaborative and Compassionate Cancer Care: The Cancer Strategy for Children and Young People in Scotland 2021-2026". The strategy emphasises the Scottish Government's commitment to improving services nationally and supporting a consistent approach to care and treatment across the country. The established managed service network for children and young people with cancer, which is a dedicated network of cancer specialists, will continue to support children and young people with cancer and to deliver on that strategy.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** How are rapid cancer diagnostic services helping to speed up treatment and improve outcomes for people across Scotland?

**Jenni Minto:** A report published by the University of Strathclyde in February 2024 found that the services are achieving what they set out to do, which is to find cancer, while delivering at speed a high standard of quality care, and that the overall median time from RCDS referral to diagnosis was 14 days.

To date, we have established six successful rapid cancer diagnostic services, significantly reducing the time taken from referral to diagnosis for people with non-specific symptoms of cancer. Our sixth RCDS was launched last month in NHS Forth Valley.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on health and social care. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a brief pause to allow the front-bench teams to change position.

## Economic Performance (A Better Deal for Taxpayers)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17980, in the name of Craig Hoy, on demanding a better deal for taxpayers in Scotland. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Craig Hoy to speak to and move the motion.

14:52

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Under the Scottish National Party, Scots are being hammered with high taxes while public services continue to decline. That is why the motion that I will move in this Parliament—a Parliament that is paid for by each and every taxpayer—will force every member of the Scottish Parliament to decide whose side they are on: whether they want to be on the side of the bloated SNP state or on the side of delivering a better deal for Scottish taxpayers. Those taxpayers are sick and tired of an SNP Government that costs them more but delivers less, of a Government that spends their money on inward-looking fringe obsessions such as gender reform and policing free speech, and of paying for meaningless quangos and a civil service that has doubled in size since 2014.

People are paying more for public services that simply are not working. We all know, deep down, that that is the case, because our constituents tell us so. Our postbags and inboxes lay bare 18 years of SNP failure on schools, hospitals, roads and railways. However, it is clear from the amendments today that it is only the Scottish Conservatives who know what the public want and need. That is why we propose a tax cut for Scottish workers, scrapping the 20p and 21p rates to create a simplified 19p rate for income up to £43,600 a year. That is a tax cut for hard workers of up to £444, while still funding front-line public services.

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

**Craig Hoy:** I have a lot of waste to identify, so I will give way later if I can.

The SNP is costing Scotland £1 billion a year in lost growth and countless billions more through incompetence and waste. The SNP Government boasts that its so-called progressive taxation—a system that taxes nurses and teachers more—is bringing in £1.7 billion a year, but the Scottish Fiscal Commission estimates that there is an economic performance gap between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom of £1.1 billion in this year alone. We know what is really going on:

the impact of the SNP's tax rises on Scots feel very real indeed, but the benefits are simply another SNP false promise.

That missing billion, in black and white, is the true cost of John Swinney. The Fiscal Commission is being characteristically diplomatic in describing it as an “economic performance gap”. I call it the deep and corrosive economic effect of 18 years of an anti-growth, anti-business SNP Government.

Every independent forecaster, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies to the Office for Budget Responsibility, the SFC and the Fraser of Allander Institute, warns that the SNP Government cannot continue on the fiscal and spending path that it is on. A benefits bill that is set to soar to £10 billion by the end of the year is £2 billion more than the Government can afford. The number of senior civil servants is soaring, and quango after quango is spewing out bizarre and costly recommendations and regulations. John Swinney's high-tax, low-growth Scotland simply cannot continue. That means taking the SNP's client state head on.

When we brought forward our fully costed plans for tax cuts this year, Shona Robison said that they would be impossible. However, on Monday, John Swinney finally admitted that she has got it wrong, announcing that, this week, the SNP Government will reveal £1 billion of SNP waste that the SNP itself has identified. However, when the SNP talks of public sector reform, we do not expect much action.

We would deliver it, however. We would reduce the size of the civil service back to pre-2016 levels within five years. We would introduce a new taxpayer savings act to cut the number of quangos by a quarter, through closing down and merging unnecessary bodies such as the Scottish Land Commission and Community Justice Scotland and creating a Scottish agency of value and efficiency—SAVE—a short-term, business-led body that is designed to mount a war on waste to claw back £500 million of misspent public money. We would introduce tighter public spending rules that would clamp down on the frivolous use of taxpayers' money and introduce sanctions on individuals who breach those rules. We would apply a zero-based accounting system to the annual budgetary process of the Scottish Government, and we would go on to reduce red tape on public services such as the national health service by reducing their statutory reporting requirements. We would also slash the cost of government, making efficiencies in public relations and human resources departments. That would mean more doctors, fewer spin doctors and more shared service hubs across government.

We would make sure that every public sector worker is focused on delivering for taxpayers. We would ban woke roles in equality, diversity and



inclusion. We would end once and for all the Scottish Government's obsession with gender issues, and ban the production of all non-statutory guidance that relates to gender identity or trans issues across the public sector.

**John Mason:** Craig Hoy has given some examples, which is what I was going to ask him for. He says that we want to save on railways. Does that mean that safety goes down? He says that we should reduce reporting requirements, yet his colleague who is next to him always asks for more transparency. Surely he cannot have both.

**Craig Hoy:** I will gladly give to John Mason the two papers that I have that detail everything that we can do to cut the horrendous waste across the Scottish public sector.

We need to do more work to dismantle the SNP's secretive and inefficient client state. We would remove the smoke and mirrors around public sector decision making by extending lobbying laws to organisations that are funded by SNP ministers just to tell them what they want to hear. We would also create a new accountability and transparency dashboard, which would provide clear information about how taxpayers' money is spent and who signed it off.

There are two sorts of SNP waste—the sort that, rightly, angers people, and the sort that, rightly and roundly, outrages them. Take the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care's use of a taxpayer-funded limousine to meet his friends in the pub for a pre-match pint prior to going to the football. It is to Neil Gray's discredit that he has not resigned, but it is to the public's dismay that John Swinney has not sacked him. Such is the level of SNP contempt for hard-pressed taxpayers that that kind of behaviour goes unchecked in SNP Scotland.

The SNP says that it will change, but the past is the best guide to the future. The SNP's credit score with the country is seriously impaired. A billion pounds has been wasted on Barlinnie prison, which was meant to cost just £100 million; £500 million has been wasted on two out-of-date ferries; £50 million has been wasted on malicious prosecutions; and £30 million has been wasted on a national care service that was scrapped before it even started. That is the reality of the SNP's casual disregard for taxpayers' money.

In contrast, we would deliver tax cuts for workers, wage a war on waste right across government, and tackle head-on the SNP's bloated client state.

Those are the policies, based on sound, common-sense Conservative values, that Scotland so badly needs. Sadly, it will never get them from the SNP Government.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the Scottish Government's failure to grow Scotland's economy has led to an economic performance gap worth £1.1 billion in 2025-26 alone; believes that there should be a crackdown on wasteful expenditure from the Scottish Government through the tightening of spending rules in the Scottish Public Finance Manual, reducing the number of highly paid senior executives within the public sector, and reversing the recent ministerial pay rise, and calls on the Scottish Government to use the proceeds of a crackdown on waste to cut income tax by up to £444 for every person in Scotland by abolishing the 20% and 21% rates of income tax, so that everyone earning up to £43,662 pays 19p for every £1 earned.

14:59

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The investment that we are making this year in our public services is made possible by the tax choices that we have made and the vital additional funding that they provide. The Tories and, indeed, other Opposition members need to explain to the Parliament what they would cut if we had not taken those tax decisions, but instead, we hear demands for further spending and, at the same time, cuts to taxation—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, please resume your seat. I will set some parameters here. I appreciate that some individuals are seeking to make an intervention, which is perfectly laudable, but others are shouting from a sedentary position, which is not acceptable and will not happen, not least because I will have to keep interrupting, which will shorten the debating time of members who are further down the list in the debate.

**Shona Robison:** Their position is not credible and the public knows that it is not credible, which is why the Tories have such low support among the public.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** In Mr Hoy's speech, he spelt out exactly what measures the Conservatives are going to take. Why can the cabinet secretary not admit that?

**Shona Robison:** We know the standard of what is provided by the Tories—unfunded tax cuts made on the back of a fag packet. We will take no lessons from a party that destroyed the economy. Many members on the Conservative benches supported Liz Truss and her economic policies, which hard-pressed householders are still paying for through their mortgage payments. We have had Tory economic policy during the years—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Johnson, please do not.

**Shona Robison:** Michael Marra seems to want to defend that for some strange reason. The Conservatives proposed almost £1 billion in tax cuts last year in advance of the budget, and the impact of that approach on our essential public services, including our NHS, would be profound.

Our progressive approach to tax underpins the entire Scottish budget, allowing us to support the most generous social contract in any part of the UK, which includes things such as free prescriptions, free higher education and support such as the Scottish child payment, all of which would be put at risk with the Conservatives' contrasting income tax proposals, which would seek to reverse our progressive approach and give the greatest tax cut to the top 25 per cent of income tax payers.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way. When did she first become aware that there were at least £1 billion of savings to be made in efficiencies, as was revealed in *The Herald* on Monday? Where is she looking for the £1 billion? It seems so difficult for her to understand—and I do not believe that it can be—that we are proposing a costed programme of savings. The Government is saying that it is going to save £1 billion. Where is the £1 billion to be saved? Let us hear where the £1 billion is to be saved.

**Shona Robison:** I am sure that Stephen Kerr will be on the front bench tomorrow to hear Ivan McKee's statement on public service reform, in which he will set out the work that is already under way. It started many years ago and has been accelerated by the work of the Minister for Public Finance. Stephen Kerr will see the detail of that tomorrow, and I am sure that he will be present for it.

The Opposition is also keen to talk down the Scottish economy. Day in, day out, we hear that in this place. The reality is that the Scottish economy is one of the best performing in the UK.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Shona Robison:** I will later, if I have time.

Since 2007, gross domestic product per person in Scotland has grown by 10.3 per cent, compared with 6.1 per cent in the UK, and productivity has grown at an average rate of 1.1 per cent per year, compared with a UK average of 0.4 per cent. Most recently, in 2024, Scotland's economy grew by 1.2 per cent, compared with a UK rate of 1.1 per cent.

I will give way to Daniel Johnson.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It will need to be very brief, Mr Johnson.

**Daniel Johnson:** Would the cabinet secretary care to quote those figures since 2016 and acknowledge whether they are higher or lower for Scotland compared with the UK for that time period?

**Shona Robison:** It is the long-term growth that matters. *[Interruption.]*

I do not know why Daniel Johnson and the Opposition—

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Shona Robison:** No, thank you. I do not know why Daniel Johnson and the Opposition cannot accept that it is a good thing that, since 2007, gross domestic product per person in Scotland has grown by 10.3 per cent compared with 6.1 per cent in the UK. Why can they not simply accept that that is a good thing?

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Craig Hoy:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary is now in her final minute.

**Shona Robison:** Craig Hoy talked about an economic performance gap, but Professor Graeme Roy from the Scottish Fiscal Commission has been clear that, in the context of income tax, that does not refer to an assessment of Scottish Government policy or performance—rather, it is

“purely a technical measure and is not meant to be a commentary on Scottish Government performance.”—*[Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee, 10 December 2024; c 37.]*

That is what Graeme Roy from the Scottish Fiscal Commission has said.

To conclude, last week's spending review has not helped the position in Scotland. An increase of spending of just 0.8 per cent over the next three years, compared with an average of 1.2 per cent for UK departments, leaves us facing a £1.1 billion shortfall. The spending review was disappointing for resource and capital spend and infrastructure investment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will need to conclude.

**Shona Robison:** To come back to the point about public service reform, tomorrow Ivan McKee will set out the detail of what we have been doing and what we will do. We will do it in a way that is sustainable and works out the detail, not the nonsense that we have heard from the Tories today.

I move amendment S6M-17980.2, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“believes that public service reform must be an ongoing process in order to deliver the best use of public funding, and recognises that the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party’s arbitrary scheme would lead to a cut in available public funding for vital services like the NHS.”

15:06

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** In what is a feat of surprisingly accurate economic analysis that you would not expect from the acolytes of Liz Truss, the Scottish Tories have pinpointed one of the deep problems at the heart of Scotland’s finances. That problem is, of course, the Scottish National Party Government. It has an abysmal record of 18 years of waste, incompetence and, increasingly, chaos—£6.7 billion of taxpayers’ money wasted on ferries that do not sail, prisons that do not get built, a deposit return scheme that did not recycle a single bottle and a national care service that did not employ a single carer. Hard-working Scots are literally paying the price of SNP failure, with over £1.6 billion spent on the scandal of delayed discharge because the SNP cannot get Scotland’s NHS working.

Normally, whenever I lay out that litany of waste, it is met with complaint and howls of derision from SNP members, but it is good to have supporters on the front bench today, with the belated admission that, by their own estimates, they waste £1 billion a year. That is, of course, on top of the tally that I have just laid out.

Scotland has also suffered from the chaos and financial mismanagement of finance secretaries, who, with one exception, still sit around the Cabinet table. There has been failure to supply crucial information to the independent forecaster, refusal to publish core documents, including a pay policy, capital spending plans and the medium-term financial strategy, and chaotic, knee-jerk in-year announcements such as the council tax freeze that nobody knew about. Party politics is always put first.

Budget after budget does not even last six months, and there have now been three consecutive years of emergency in-year cuts slashing funding across the board to balance the books. There really is no other word for it—it is complete and utter chaos.

The Labour Party believes strongly in progressive taxation, but to ensure public support for progressive taxation, we have to show people what they get in return, and the SNP has utterly failed to do that. Every year, Scots are paying more and getting less in return. One in six Scots is on an NHS waiting list, schools are sliding down the international league tables, there is a housing emergency and councils are cutting key services. Better public services, more investment and a

better standard of living is what people should be getting from paying their fair share in tax, but, under the SNP, that could not be further from the truth.

Meanwhile, the Tories have failed to acknowledge the economic and fiscal realities in which the UK operates. British public finances were left in a truly terrible state by the previous Tory Government. Over 14 years, it presided over a low-wage, no-growth economy. It inflicted austerity on public services, doing lasting damage to them all. It crashed the economy, sending interest rates spiralling. It presided over a cost of living crisis with sky-high inflation not seen since the 1970s. It closed the last Parliament with living standards lower than they were at the opening of that Parliament for the first time since the Napoleonic wars. It spent the last year of that Parliament promising money that it did not have in a desperate attempt to buy votes, leaving a gaping black hole in Britain’s public finances. It spent the annual national reserve three times over in the first three months of that year, Mr Hoy. All of that left the incoming UK Labour Government with a major clean-up operation to undertake. There was no apology, no humility and no shame from the Conservatives.

Frankly, the Conservatives’ plans today are not worthy of the back of a fag packet. This afternoon, they have brought half-baked, reheated tax cuts to the Parliament, and we should not believe a word of it. Cutting down on quangos would not deliver the savings that are needed for such drastic tax cuts; they would surely mean deep cuts to core public services such as our NHS. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has projected that the NHS will account for an increasingly large share of the Scottish budget: up to almost 55 per cent in the next 50 years. With an ageing population, that investment is absolutely essential. Are the Conservatives really proposing that we defund our NHS to fund tax cuts?

The UK Labour Government is facing up to the mess that both parties here in the chamber have made of our country. Last week’s game-changing spending review saw record investment for Scotland, with a £9.1 billion boost to Scotland’s budget—the highest settlement in the history of devolution.

**Liz Smith:** Will Michael Marra give way?

**Michael Marra:** No, thank you, madam.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Marra is about to conclude.

**Michael Marra:** To give you the words of the *Daily Record*, the Chancellor’s spending review

“means the SNP Government can no longer blame Westminster for Scotland’s ills. Successive SNP First Ministers have cited UK Government austerity as the

reason for struggling services. Rachel Reeves, who has handed Holyrood an extra £9.1bn, has called time on that excuse.”

Enough of the excuses from the SNP. Enough of the half-baked ideas from the Tories. Let us get our economy moving.

I move amendment S6M-17980.1, to leave out from “believes” to end and insert:

“understands that the Scottish National Party administration has wasted in excess of £6.7 billion of taxpayers’ money since 2007; believes that the Scottish Government’s reckless spending and failure to grow Scotland’s economy has led to an overreliance on tax increases to plug annual budget gaps; welcomes the UK Government’s decision to decisively end austerity, deliver a record budget settlement for Scotland, and pledge an extra £9.1 billion over the next three years, and believes that the Scottish Labour Party’s plan to establish a Scottish treasury with strategic oversight for spending in all Scottish Government departments is essential in order to put an end to waste and ensure that people in Scotland get value for money.”

15:11

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** In this debate, we will cover ground that we have covered many times before. Although the Scottish Conservatives routinely ask in the Parliament for additional spending, they also routinely deride the taxation that is needed to provide that spending. The Tory magic money tree is sadly a figment of their imaginations. In the real world, countries need to generate revenue, and that means taxation. Taxation is the means by which we pool our resources for the collective good. That money is then allocated for spending and investment by a democratically elected Government.

It is a truth that is not universally accepted in the UK that, if you want Scandinavian levels of public services, you have to pay Scandinavian levels of tax. Believing in a magic money tree or in the growth fairy does not eliminate that truth, however much you wish that it might. High GDP growth does not, by itself, contribute to quality of life and society. In isolation, what it tends to do is indicate that the rich are getting richer while more and more people are being left behind. To see that, we have only to look to America, where there is high GDP growth but staggering levels of poverty, homelessness, violence and people without healthcare, and high maternal mortality.

No matter what your GDP is, redistribution of wealth is needed to fund public services and to ensure a functioning society. Without wealth redistribution, the rich will forever get richer while the poor get poorer, until the fabric of society frays and falls apart. For those who believe in a growth-first economic model—those who say, “Once we have growth, then we can put money towards community centres and universal childcare”—what

is the magic level of growth that suddenly unlocks that policy change? When has enough wealth been generated that we can start to redistribute it? That model is a toolbox fallacy.

**Liz Smith:** One of the pieces of evidence is something called the Laffer curve, which, as some of the member’s predecessors in the Government knew, is a diagram that shows that when you increase tax, sadly, at one point, the revenue starts to go down.

**Lorna Slater:** I am aware of the Laffer curve. I am also aware of where it has been discredited and where it applies. It applies specifically to income taxes and not to the kind of taxes that the Scottish Greens advocate, such as land value tax and wealth taxation.

Our society is extremely wealthy. There is no shortage of money. It is just that it is concentrated in the hands of a few very wealthy people.

For a bit of fun, when preparing for this debate, I put this question into an artificial intelligence chat interface:

“Between lower house prices, free tuition, baby boxes, free prescriptions, free bus travel for under 22s, free eye tests, and free social care is a person earning £100,000 a year in Scotland better off than a person living in England, even with Scotland’s different income tax regime?”

Its conclusion was:

“If you’re single, child-free, and healthy, England may offer better net income. But if you have a family, children in education, or elderly relatives needing care”—

which is most of us—

“Scotland’s public services can provide significant non-cash value that may outweigh the tax difference.” [*Interruption.*]

**Lorna Slater:** I have only four minutes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is about to conclude.

**Lorna Slater:** I then asked the AI:

“What about someone earning an average Scottish wage?”

The response was:

“For someone earning the average wage, Scotland is likely better overall than England due to ... Comparable or slightly lower income tax ... Significant savings from public services”

and

“Lower cost of living”.

Thank you, AI—I could not have said it better. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Willie Rennie to open on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

15:16

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I think that I like—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie, could you sit down, please?

Could those on the Conservative benches show some courtesy and respect to other speakers in this debate, please?

I again call Willie Rennie to open on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

**Willie Rennie:** I like this new Lorna Slater, who is outsourcing intelligence to artificial intelligence. We might see some new radical policies—perhaps even more radical than before.

I like a robust and colourful contribution in the chamber. I admire Craig Hoy for his approach to politics, because it is sometimes very entertaining and educational. However, I have to say that he took a kamikaze approach today. I was looking back at a headline in a newspaper in, I think, 2022. It said:

“Boris Johnson’s partygate scandal a ‘difference of opinion’, Craig Hoy says.”

He was dismissing the partygate scandal, somehow.

I think that it is reasonable to ask questions of Neil Gray—as long as we understand that we need to reflect on our own past comments and observations on our own party when doing so. For Craig Hoy to make that speech about economic and financial competence, given his party’s responsibility for Liz Truss, Brexit and even Boris Johnson, took a great degree of courage. I give him full credit for making that attempt this afternoon.

Public service reform should be boring. It should be boring, detailed and hard work to find out where efficiencies can be made. The more exciting that public service reform is, the more superficial it is—in such cases, it is more of a vote-catching effort than it is a real attempt at public service reform. I am afraid to say that Craig Hoy’s list today was just all eye catching, rather than a real attempt at changing the way in which public services operate.

The size of the state has increased—there is no doubt about that. What we need to work out is how we get it back down to pre-Covid levels. We need a detailed understanding of that. I hope that, tomorrow, the minister will set out a very clear programme of boring, detailed change that results in a difference, because it is the difference that really matters in the long run.

We also need digital and AI—this is perhaps where I agree with Lorna Slater—to be at the heart of the work that we are doing.

**Daniel Johnson rose—**

**Willie Rennie:** I will see whether I can give way shortly.

I am afraid that I speak to a number of experts in that sector who believe that the Government is just not at the races when it comes to aligning the public services in a way in which digital processes can be used to bring uniformity and deliver efficiencies. Many experts out there are saying exactly that.

**Daniel Johnson rose—**

**Willie Rennie:** I am sorry, but I have only four minutes.

The main point that I want to make is that, to get our public finances back on track, we need to get our economy moving. The biggest problem that we have is the economic inactivity rate, which is at 24 per cent. In England, it is at 21 per cent, which is not much better, but the figure is just dreadful in Scotland. At the heart of that is getting the NHS into a position in which it can get back to work people who would work if they were able to do so. That is now about ailments of the mind, whereas in the past it was about ailments of the body.

We need to reorientate the NHS so that it is focused on economic productivity. That will make a tremendous difference to the taxes that we raise and to our ability to afford public services. If we can sort that, we will have achieved something in this Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I advise members that the small amount of additional time that was available has been entirely used up by the preceding front-bench exchanges, so members will need to stick to a four-minute limit. Any interventions that are taken must be absorbed within members’ agreed speaking time.

15:20

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** My colleague Craig Hoy outlined a commonsense vision for Scotland’s economy—a vision that is rooted in fairness, ambition and opportunity. We fundamentally believe that Scots deserve a better deal than what they are currently getting under the SNP Government. After 18 years in power, the SNP is presiding over a stagnating economy, a ballooning civil service and an economic performance gap of £1.1 billion, with billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money wasted on pet projects—money that should have gone to front-line services instead.

The list of SNP failures is too long to go through this afternoon. The impact is simple: people are paying more and getting less—I agree with

Michael Marra on that. One key difference between the Scottish Conservatives and other parties in the chamber is that we believe in small government. We believe in empowering people to succeed, not holding them back. However, the SNP, the Greens and Labour want to keep people stuck in the doldrums in perpetuity.

Although the Scottish Conservatives support vulnerable people, the SNP is handing out hard-earned taxpayers' money, with the cost of the welfare state expected to reach £9 billion by 2030. The cosy left-wing consensus that has held Scotland back for decades is dumbing down Scotland rather than lifting it up.

**Shona Robison:** Could Rachael Hamilton specify who those handouts are being given to? Who are we talking about?

**Rachael Hamilton:** We have identified many tax-saving policies that the Government could implement. We agree with the Scottish child payment, but we want people to be lifted up, not knocked down. We want people to have jobs and to be supported into work. We do not want them to be held back in the way that the Scottish Government is holding back the economy. I point out to Shona Robison that even the Scottish Fiscal Commission has told us that Scotland faces an £851 million income tax black hole due to the rising costs of benefits, public sector pay and new policy commitments.

Beyond the fiscal mismanagement—although Shona Robison does not seem to accept that the SNP is mismanaging the economy—the SNP has a bloated public sector that now accounts for the second-highest share of employment of any region or nation in the UK, and the bureaucracy continues to grow. Scotland now has 130 quangos, with more on the way.

Then there is the tax system, which has been described as “daft” by one of the SNP’s own MSPs. Scotland is now the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom, which is not something to be proud of. The SNP should be ashamed. Workers here are unfairly penalised and pay more tax than those who do the same jobs elsewhere in the UK.

In my constituency, which is in the Scottish Borders, residents told me last week that they feel like they have been paying more but getting less, which is something that we have heard many times in the chamber. People see local services in decline, despite SNP claims to the contrary. We must offer people a different path for Scotland and a better path to economic prosperity.

The Scottish Conservatives have put forward positive and practical policies that would improve people’s lives. We believe in a smaller and more efficient state that delivers better value for money and better services for lower taxes. We would give

Scottish taxpayers a better deal by cutting taxes to 19 per cent for all taxable income up to £43,600. That would be worth £444 to ordinary working Scots. We believe in restoring value for money, and we would introduce a taxpayer savings act.

Tomorrow, we will hear from Ivan McKee about public sector reform, so SNP ministers clearly agree that there is blob and bloat in their Government. We believe in rebuilding trust with the public. We believe that Scotland can do better. The SNP should be listening to the Scottish Conservatives.

15:25

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Let us start with the ludicrous suggestion that, after taking no pay rise, Scottish ministers should continue to wear a hair shirt and endure declining real incomes year on year, even though the UK has had cumulative inflation of 70 per cent over 17 years. Which other societal groups do the Tories feel should not receive a pay rise for 17 years? It would certainly not be UK ministers—there are now 121—under successive Labour, coalition and Tory Governments. There has not been a peep about their pay from the Westminster devotees to my left—the Tories—which completely devalues their already threadbare argument. It is just a cheap, nasty and rather pitiful shot that devalues what was already an incoherent and poorly cobbled together motion.

The Tories suggest that they would cut tax “by up to £444 for every person in Scotland”.

I was not aware that every person in Scotland paid tax, as the clumsily written motion suggests. Children, many pensioners, prisoners, students, the unemployed and so on do not pay tax. The motion says “up to £444”, which means that some people would gain very little—I note that it is not an average, but “up to”, which is like buying double glazing and getting “up to” X pounds off. The Tories must do better if they are to reclaim even a soupçon of the credibility that they lost by backing the Liz Truss economic catastrophe less than three years ago, which led to the highest UK tax take since world war two.

How much would the Tories’ tax cut reduce spending by? What would be cut? They suggest a nice, easy target:

“highly paid public sector senior executives”.

The UK Tory Government that they urged us to re-elect last year did not cut such jobs, but apparently we should. Which ones? What would be the impact on public service delivery if talented people voted with their feet and left the public sector? It is just empty, lazy, thoughtless populism, which is aimed at clawing back votes from the Faragists.

Come budget time, we will no doubt hear from Tory MSPs the same tedious litanies in which they demand more expenditure in every single Scottish Government portfolio ad nauseum. It is as boring as it is stupefyingly predictable.

If the Tories truly believed in a crackdown on waste, one might be more sympathetic. However, that is belied by their UK Government's waste of tens of billions on shoddy defence procurement, dodgy public-private partnerships in services, which were often provided by Tory pals, and high speed 2, which has been delayed again and is set to cost over £100 billion.

**Liz Smith:** Will the member give way?

**Kenneth Gibson:** As for the economic performance gap, I quote the evidence that Professor Graeme Roy gave to the Finance and Public Administration Committee last week:

"The net tax position is interesting ... it is not an assessment of Scottish Government policy or performance ... As we highlight in the report, it could be down to different policy decisions; it could be the result of a UK Government decision having an impact on Scotland relative to the UK; it could be a Scottish Government decision having an impact on Scotland relative to the UK; or it could just be down to general economic performance in Scotland ... London is also a factor ... If the city has a really good year ... it will be harder for Scotland with regard to the net tax position."—*[Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee, 10 June 2025; c 20.]*

EY's annual UK attractiveness survey reports that Scotland, which has only 8.2 per cent of the UK's population, secured 15.8 per cent of UK inward investment projects last year, which created 4,330 Scottish jobs. That record market share cements Scotland as the UK's top destination outside London for the 10th year in a row, and the sixth best in Europe. Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow remain among the top seven UK cities for foreign direct investment. EY's global investor survey found that a quarter of those who are planning to invest in the UK are targeting Scotland, which maintains our long-standing position as the UK's preferred destination outside London.

**Liz Smith:** Will the member give way?

**Kenneth Gibson:** Scotland's continued success in attracting inward investment is testament to our skilled workforce, world-class universities and commitment to innovation. Despite global economic instability, investors recognise the strength and stability of Scotland's economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** You need to conclude.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Those projects bring high-quality jobs and long-term opportunities to communities across the country, which is a clear sign that Scotland is open for business. Inward-

looking Tories do not want to hear that and would close our overseas offices, where Scottish Development International engages with investors. We will pursue growth while the Tories undermine efforts to secure it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I apologise for not taking interventions, but a speaking time of four minutes is clearly not long enough.

15:29

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Our motion demands an end to the high-tax and low-delivery agenda that the Scottish Government has been pursuing for the past 18 years.

The Scottish Conservatives accept that the Scottish Parliament should have a wide range of powers over taxation to support Scottish businesses and taxpayers and to incentivise strong economic growth. Those are both things that the Scottish public would no doubt support. However, since receiving powers over Scottish income tax, the SNP has used them to turn Scotland into the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. After years of endless tinkering with Scottish income tax, the Scottish Government has left us with a system in which anyone who earns more than about £30,000 pays more in tax than they would if they lived in any other part of the United Kingdom

The Scottish tax system has no fewer than six separate bands, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies has described the system as being "unnecessarily complicated". The Scottish Parliament information centre has pointed out that, since 2017-18, the higher rate threshold has remained largely unchanged, which has dragged thousands more taxpayers into the higher tax bracket. About 22 per cent of Scottish taxpayers now pay the higher rate, with that percentage having doubled over the past eight years.

Our motion mentions the economic performance gap that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has identified. The SNP's tax system is no doubt responsible for some of that gap. The Scottish Fiscal Commission's findings assume that the changes to the tax system will have certain behavioural impacts. Further analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that the behavioural changes might be even worse than the Fiscal Commission's assumptions. That means that much more spending is being wasted and that people are getting a worse deal. I very much doubt that that is what the Scottish public wanted as a result of taxation being dealt with in this Parliament.

What are taxpayers getting in exchange for their higher taxes? Scotland's education system is now internationally average. Scotland has record NHS waiting lists. There has been a litany of broken promises on upgrading roads. It is clear from those things, combined with a bloated and costly public sector and the millions of pounds that have been spent on ferries, that the Scottish public are getting a raw deal.

Our motion sets out what a better deal for taxpayers would look like. As well as cracking down on waste, we would abolish the basic and intermediate tax rates. That would ensure that every Scot would save up to £444, with those earning up to £43,662 paying 19p for every £1 earned.

As Sir Tom Hunter recently warned, Scotland is not reaching its full potential. We need a new approach to the country's finances instead of the old-fashioned left-wing approach that has dominated the Scottish Government for far too long. A package of commonsense changes such as the ones that we have proposed would be the first step in making progress.

The Scottish Government needs to stop managing decline and start rewarding success. We have lots of successful businesses across the country, but that success is being stifled by the Scottish Government's measures. We would empower Scotland and give Scottish taxpayers the value for money that they deserve, rather than them paying more and getting less.

15:33

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** We need to lower the temperature a bit. As members know, I always like to strike a consensual tone, so I thank the Government and the Conservatives for providing arguments that I can agree with.

I agree with the Conservatives that the Scottish Government suddenly furnishing us with the figure of £1 billion of waste a year is somewhat striking, in relation to both the quantum and the fact that it has taken the Government 18 years to come forward with that. In turn, I agree with the Government that it is somewhat ironic for the Conservatives to present such a miraculous plan. I note that the savings are not added up in the Conservatives' documentation, so we do not know whether their sums add up at all.

When did we last hear about a 19p basic tax rate? That is right—it was in the mini-budget from Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng. With straight faces, the Scottish Conservatives are coming to the chamber with exactly the same uncosted tax cuts as were proposed by the UK Conservative Government that led to the calamity of increased

mortgage bills, a run on the pound and a run on the cost of UK borrowing. That is simply not credible.

**Craig Hoy:** Will Daniel Johnson give way?

**Daniel Johnson:** I am happy to give way if Craig Hoy can explain why the Scottish Conservatives are doing that.

**Craig Hoy:** Does Mr Johnson think that the people who are watching the debate will find it a bit rich that the Labour Party, which broke its promise on tax, is lecturing the Parliament about tax?

**Daniel Johnson:** With that, we find out that the Conservatives have learned precisely nothing.

Let us look at public service reform. Frankly, I think that Willie Rennie was absolutely right to say that public service reform should be routine—it should be boring, measured and continual. The problem is that the Scottish Government has postponed it for 18 years. However, the Conservatives have made a critical mistake, because such reform is not about shrinking the state but about looking at where head-count increases should occur. The reality is that, over the past decade, civil service head count has increased by 71 per cent—that is three times the rate of head-count increase in the NHS and 10 times that of local government—while police head count has fallen by 6 per cent and that of further education by 10 per cent.

**Shona Robison:** Does Daniel Johnson recognise that a large portion of that increase is due to the establishment of Social Security Scotland and the devolution of welfare benefits?

**Daniel Johnson:** Social Security Scotland accounts for 3,000 of the head-count increase, which is less than a third. The total head-count increase is between 8,000 and 9,000, and about a third of that is from Social Security Scotland, so that is not an adequate answer.

This comes at a time when we have £6.7 billion-worth of waste from things such as ferries and scrapped deposit return schemes and when the Scottish Government seems to seek to reheat the arguments for full fiscal autonomy, with the loss of the 20 per cent premium that we gain through the Barnett formula.

Ultimately, there is a lack of engagement with the economic performance gap, which is dismissed as a technicality. It is not a technicality. The performance gap boils down to a difference in the earnings of everyday Scots; it is about tax receipts.

It is instructive that the cabinet secretary could not answer my question about the increase in GDP per head since 2016—it is 4.4 per cent for



the UK and 2.6 per cent for Scotland. That date is important because 2016 is the year against which fiscal devolution is benchmarked; it dictates how much money we have to spend. The fact that the cabinet secretary could not answer that question and does not understand its relevance tells us everything that we need to know about the Scottish Government's incompetence when it comes to public finances and the economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** George Adam is the final speaker in the open debate.

15:37

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I found the opening remarks from Tory members quite entertaining—indeed, if people took them seriously, they would be offensive. In particular, I chuckled at the line that it is only the Scottish Conservatives who know what Scots want. That was a total belter, as they say in my neck of the woods. We must give the Conservatives their due—if Tory political spin were renewable energy, Scotland would reach net zero by tea time. As we live in the real world, we know what the Conservatives are really all about.

The Conservatives come here today to demand a better deal for taxpayers, as if they have not just spent the past 14 years making everyone poorer, crashing the economy and sending household bills through the roof. The same crowd who gave us Liz Truss and a mortgage hike now want us to believe that they have the answers. The Tories want us to believe that they have suddenly found a magic formula for fixing the economy—after they crashed it, after they hiked mortgages and after they dragged us out of the European Union, which is costing Scotland billions. Now here we are, with a motion built on slogans that has very little substance.

The Conservatives talk about cracking down on waste but offer no real plan, just the same old Tory playbook—cut taxes for high earners and slash public services to pay for that. They want to rip £1.5 billion out of the budget and then pretend that nobody will notice the consequences to the NHS, schools or social care. Those of us with longer memories know exactly what the Tories are all about and what Tory economics means for our communities.

In the 1980s and 1990s, it was the Conservative Party that sucked the economic life out of towns such as Paisley. We watched as the looms fell silent, the mill gates closed, the Anchor and Ferguslie mills all disappeared, and the car factories and electronic firms that once sustained local families shut down, one by one. Unemployment soared, and that was believed to be acceptable by an uncaring Westminster

Government. Community spirit in Paisley and in towns across Scotland was tested to the limit. That was not reform; it was Tory economics at its harshest—and it did not support anyone from my community. That is what Tory value for money looks like in the real world, in real towns and for real people in Scotland.

We now have a Scottish Parliament and a Scottish Government that have delivered a balanced budget that funds front-line services—a budget that most parties in this Parliament supported. While the Tories were voting against that budget, the Scottish Government was investing in our NHS, boosting education, reintroducing winter fuel payments for pensioners and protecting the vulnerable.

More than 60 per cent of Scots are better off under our tax and social security policies. Most Scots pay less income tax than people elsewhere in the UK. That is fairness in action.

Unlike the Conservatives' lack of a plan, our approach is progressive, responsible and honest about how we will fund the services that people rely on. For far too long, the Tories have postured in the chamber while Scotland has been getting on with the job. We are growing the economy. For the 10th year in a row, Scotland is the top destination in the UK for inward investment outside London.

Scotland deserves better than further reheated Tory austerity. Scots deserve a Government that invests in our people, protects the most vulnerable and builds for the long term. That is exactly what this Scottish Government is doing every single day. It is time for us to reject this Tory nonsense.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches.

15:41

**Lorna Slater:** The content of Craig Hoy's opening speech was spectacularly Trumpian. Not only does he want to implement something like DOGE—the US Department of Government Efficiency—to get rid of imaginary waste, but he wants to ban diversity, equality and inclusion and remove support for trans kids and adults. That is a heck of a track record to go on, given the success of the Trump regime in America, which has seen the largest protests ever against such policies. Good on the Scottish Conservatives for picking up on some popular policies there.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Lorna Slater:** No—I have only four minutes.

One of the things that Craig Hoy said that he would get rid of is the Scottish Land Commission, which is the public body that supports land reform.

Land ownership in Scotland is highly unequal and concentrated, with a small number of individuals and entities owning vast areas of land—433 landowners own 50 per cent of Scotland's privately owned land. That concentration limits opportunities for local and community development, especially in rural areas. It is mind-boggling that the Scottish Conservatives, who purport to champion rural areas, would want to get rid of that body. However, the Conservatives are, of course, in the business of keeping rich and powerful landlords and landowners rich and powerful. That is what they are here for.

As for Michael Marra's contribution, Scotland offers more generous and accessible public services than England does, because of higher per capita spending and the different policy choices that are made in Scotland. The big question is whether Labour will bring in policies such as free school meals, free bus travel for under-22s and free prescriptions throughout the UK to bring England's public services up to the level of Scotland's. So far, England has been lagging behind. Now that Labour is in government at Westminster, the Scottish Labour Party needs to look at how it will help England to catch up.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** [*Made a request to intervene.*]

**Lorna Slater:** I am sorry, Mr Kerr. I have only four minutes, so I need to press on.

The single most important tax reform that we could make in Scotland is to reform council tax. Unfortunately, every party other than the Scottish Greens voted against our proposals to revalue council tax and move away from the absurdity of using 1991 property values, which has most people paying the wrong rate and makes the tax regressive, which means that the people who have the least pay the most. That is not fair, and nor is it raising the money that our councils need to provide public services.

We have only to look at Liz Truss's mini-budget and Donald Trump's big, beautiful bill—I am sure that Craig Hoy is a fan of it; he certainly sounded as if he was adopting Trumpian policies—to see how tax cutting can be counterproductive to economic success, and downright devastating for ordinary people.

Tax cuts largely benefit the wealthy. Public services largely benefit people on average wages who have children, health needs and care needs. I know who I would like the Government to support.

15:45

**Michael Marra:** I welcome the new consensus in Scottish politics, which has been signed up to by all sides—and perhaps even by artificial

intelligence—that the Scottish Government is wasting a massive amount of money. Clearly, we will hear more about that tomorrow in a well-advertised statement: Willie Rennie expects it to be very boring but, hopefully, very detailed. The minister is well aware that the Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee has been calling for a proper programme of public service reform for years now, and many independent bodies have bemoaned the fact that there has been no evidence of it as such.

This is a Tory debate, and we have heard the Tories' proposition based on their recently published policy document. I gave it its second download just this afternoon, and a thriller it is. There are plenty of pictures of Russell Findlay looking moody. Does he ever look anything but? It sets a savings target of some £642 million. It identifies a £1.5 million saving by closing Architecture and Design Scotland. Unfortunately, however, £500 million of the heavy lifting is to be saved by drawing a target around that figure on one of the pages of the document. That is how the money is to be saved. It is a project to save half a billion pounds with no detail whatsoever about how to do it.

The rest of the money is to be saved by "STOPPING THE WASTED TIME ON WOKE".

That is a risible attempt at an intervention in the public spending debate, which is not worth the publication at all. It is right-wing populism by numbers. It is fantastical nonsense.

That brings me, in part, to Kenny Gibson's speech and his rejection of the tax changes that the UK Labour Government has put in place. He is of course right to point out some of the challenges that arise from those tax changes. Unfortunately, the SNP Government has rejected the entirety of the tax adjustments of some £45 billion, which have had to be used to try to rescue the public finances from the mess left by the Tory Government.

It does not stop there. Prior to the UK budget that was set out last autumn, there were demands from the SNP Government for £70 billion of additional spending—and the Scottish Government did not stop there. In the run-up to the spending review, just in the past few weeks, there was another £20 billion-worth of demands for public spending.

In total, there were £90 billion-worth of demands, with a complete rejection of £45 billion for raising the money. That is not credible and not sensible. Frankly, for a Scottish Government that wants to engage with the UK Government on a proactive basis and on a proper level, as we regularly hear from the cabinet secretary, it is not fit for purpose—far from it.

Last week, we had the unedifying spectacle of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government agreeing with Alba and Reform that the Barnett formula should be scrapped in Scotland. It is utter nonsense to give up voluntarily an additional 20 per cent for spending on public services in Scotland.

Lorna Slater asked about the funding of public services across the rest of the UK. She might have missed the massive expansion of free school meals south of the border, but she will know that £9.1 billion of additional spending is coming to Scotland.

I pay tribute to Daniel Johnson's very relevant observation that the date of 2016 is incredibly important to the fiscal framework in this country. I advise the cabinet secretary to revise her speaking notes on that basis. The fact that UK GDP per head grew by 4.4 per cent, compared with the 2.6 per cent figure for Scotland, is critical to the economic performance gaps: it flows through the fiscal framework, to which the cabinet secretary is a signatory.

15:49

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** I thank everyone who has taken part in the debate.

I will start with Willie Rennie's contribution and give him my sincere and heartfelt assurance that my statement tomorrow will, indeed, be very boring but that it will address the challenges that he has identified. He is absolutely right that treating the debate as some kind of show will not get to the reality of the detail that must be dealt with in order to transform Scottish public services. I will go through that in more detail tomorrow.

Willie Rennie made a number of points about digital, which, again, I will cover to a significant extent tomorrow. AI is very much part of our consideration, but we need to get the balance right and ensure that ethics are well considered when we roll it out. I will talk more about that tomorrow.

**Daniel Johnson:** Although we might disagree on much, does the minister agree that this is not about shrinking the state, and that reform must be about freeing up people for front-line public service delivery?

**Ivan McKee:** Yes, I agree. It is not about a smaller state; it is about a state that is the right size to deliver what it needs to deliver and getting the workforce and resources in the right place to do so.

Willie Rennie talked about our NHS. Just yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care unveiled two documents on service renewal and population health that articulate how

we are going to take the reform agenda forward in the health and social care space.

Craig Hoy talked at length about all kinds of stuff. As usual, he was looking for uncosted tax cuts at the same time as spending increases, which is what we have come to expect from the Tory Party.

I think that I must have been the third person, after Michael Marra, to download the Tory document. I had a wee look at it while I was listening to Craig Hoy. As far as I can tell, he identified three public bodies that he wants to get rid of, which is a long way from the quarter of public bodies that he is targeting. He would then, of course, add another one, by putting in place a new quango whose job I am not quite sure of but which seems to be about taking forward work that this Government is already doing, without an additional quango.

If he was paying attention yesterday, he would have noticed that the health secretary has merged two NHS bodies. We are very much in the business of looking for opportunities to save cash and, where that involves structural change, we shall take that forward. Again, I will say more about that tomorrow. *[Interruption.]*

**Ivan McKee:** Does somebody want to come in?

No. There was a lot of chuntering from a sedentary position.

I will move on to Rachael Hamilton's—

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Ivan McKee:** Yes, indeed.

**Douglas Lumsden:** I thank the minister for taking the intervention. When you are looking for savings, will you also look for savings from ministers taking limos to pubs? *[Interruption.]* Those are savings that could easily be had.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Speak through the chair, Mr Lumsden.

**Ivan McKee:** I missed some of that. Douglas Lumsden needs to be a bit more articulate, perhaps, but I do not think that I missed anything.

Kenny Gibson characterised the motion correctly when he talked about it being more akin to an approach taken by double glazing salesmen. If we are to look for inefficiencies, a very interesting place to look is personal protective equipment contracts south of the border.

On the recycling point, I note that Craig Hoy is very much in the recycling business; as Daniel Johnson pointed out, he is recycling Truss's policies.

On the Scottish economy, as Kenny Gibson referenced, there is higher GDP growth per person over the long term, higher productivity growth per person over the long term, lower unemployment in the here and now, and the best FDI performance over the past 10 years anywhere outside of London. That is a consequence of the international offices that SDI has around the globe; of course, the Tories want to close those, shutting off access to international investors.

There was higher growth in the Scottish economy in 2024 than in the UK economy. Interestingly, for half of that year, the UK Government was under Tory jurisdiction and, for the other half, it was under Labour jurisdiction, so I do not know who we would blame for the poor performance of the UK economy vis-à-vis what happened in Scotland. In addition, more people earn the real living wage in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.

I listened with interest to Russell Findlay on “The Sunday Show” at the weekend. He threw out a number, and I had to go back to check whether he had articulated it correctly, because he claimed that 5,500 public sector workers in Scotland earn more than £130,000 a year. We have not been able to source that figure. If he has the stats for it, I would love to see them. However, we think that he is including in that the 6,000 consultants—and employed general practitioner staff on top of that—who are of course in that bracket, because we can find only a few dozen beyond that number that are in that category. *[Interruption.]* If Russell Findlay’s message to the people of Scotland is that he is going to take an axe to NHS consultants, people should be aware of that.

In my closing remarks, I want to talk briefly—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to be very brief.

**Ivan McKee:** —about the work that we have done on public service reform. It is important to recognise that we are on a journey. Much has already been done. Tomorrow, we will articulate the next stage on that journey. We have reduced the number of public bodies in Scotland from 199 to 131. As a result of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, we have saved almost £2.5 billion in back-office costs over the past 10 years. In the past two years, we have saved £280 million through the work that we have done on procurement, estates and the automation of back-office functions.

The Scottish Government balances its budget every year. We take Scotland’s finances seriously. Next week, we will lay out the detail of our medium-term financial strategy and our fiscal sustainability delivery plan, and, tomorrow, I will

lay out the work that we will take forward in the next phase of our public service reform agenda.

15:55

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am not usually someone who gets confused, but—my goodness—I am confused today. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government is very fond of asking Opposition parties to spell out exactly what we would do differently, but, when we do, she objects. She dismisses all our accusations of SNP waste, but she has now admitted that we are right.

As for Lorna Slater’s speech, I have to say that I am very glad that it has been a short debate.

I will set the debate in context by acknowledging some of the fundamental weaknesses in the Scottish economy, which have been much debated by the independent analysts. As well as flagging up the extent of the fiscal predicament in which the Scottish Government finds itself, the analysts have made it clear that that is largely a result of the Scottish Government’s own decisions. They have highlighted the failure to deliver sustained economic growth; concerns over tax structures, especially differentials; and issues with the delivery of more efficient public services, which, as we know, is a subject that has been exercising the mind of the Finance and Public Administration Committee for many months—although I am not sure that members would have got that impression from what the committee’s convener said in his speech.

The bottom line is that Scotland has not been creating the growth that it desperately needs to create to pay for the increasing demands on public services. Senior figures in business—people such as Sandy Begbie—are all telling us—

**Ivan McKee:** If what Liz Smith has said is the case, can she explain why, last year, the Scottish economy grew faster than the UK economy?

**Liz Smith:** Daniel Johnson made a very relevant point about the extent of the growth of the Scottish economy over a period of time. The economy’s growth over time is the key issue that analysts are talking about.

I pay tribute to the Deputy First Minister, who made a very interesting speech at Panmure house two weeks ago, in which she identified that a top priority was ensuring that there is much better collaboration between the public and private sectors. That is exactly what we must do to stimulate the growth that is so sadly missing. That is an important part of what is required, and I hope that that is now part of Scottish Government policy. If it is not, we will have even more difficulties in paying for public services.

The public sector is bloated—there is no question about that. Every figure that we look at tells us that it is bloated. I want to come back to a point that was made in the chamber some months ago. During the Covid pandemic, we all got used to the state bailing us out. At the time, that was absolutely fine and correct. However, that expectation is still with us—people still expect the state to do all the work for the Scottish economy. That is not good enough, because it is not solving the problems that we need to address.

We need to attend to the economic inactivity in this country. Willie Rennie said that that was the most important problem; it is. We need to get people back to work. We need to get people to take personal responsibility for their lives and not expect the state to do everything. The Scottish Government needs to waken up to the fact that, for a long period of time, all of its policy development—especially when it comes to welfare spend—has been all about a big state. That approach is not working for Scotland. As several of my colleagues have argued this afternoon, we are getting less while paying more. That simply cannot go on.

I finish on a point that was raised, interestingly, by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which said that it is absolutely imperative that we have a proper debate about universalism. The Scottish Government, with its social contract, is absolutely in thrall to the principle of universalism, but we clearly cannot afford that universal principle in the area of welfare spend.

The cabinet secretary has often asked me what we would cut. I throw back to the cabinet secretary—I have argued this with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice—that we have to have a debate about universal policy, because there are areas of universal policy that give benefits to people who could easily afford to pay for some of those benefits themselves. That is not how the welfare system should work: it should be about lifting up those who are in particular need and targeting those who—

**Ivan McKee:** Will Liz Smith take an intervention?

**Liz Smith:** I am not sure that there is time—I am about to finish.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Very briefly, minister.

**Ivan McKee:** I am interested to hear who specifically Liz Smith would intend to target with that measure.

Also, while I am on my feet, I want to let her know that the economic inactivity rate in Scotland at the moment is 21.6 per cent. When her Tory Government was in office this time last year, the

rate was 22.3 per cent, so it is lower in Scotland now than it was when the Tories were in office down in England.

**Liz Smith:** There are two points there. Economic inactivity is the key issue. As Willie Rennie rightly pointed out—

**Ivan McKee:** [*Inaudible.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, please.

**Liz Smith:** What the minister said from a sedentary position is not correct in relation to the balance of the Scottish economy against the UK economy.

**Ivan McKee:** Those are the numbers.

**Liz Smith:** I am sure that we can debate that offline—I have gone with the Scottish Fiscal Commission's statistics.

On the question of universal payments, the minister asked me what I would do. I think that we have to look at the areas of universal payments in which, quite clearly, the payments are not all being taken up. That is an area of overspend. It is also a case in which we should be targeting those who are most in need and not giving out a whole range of benefits to people who do not necessarily need them. That is a way forward and, on that point, I will finish.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next debate, to allow front-bench teams to change.

## Defence Sector (Economic Contribution)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17981, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on recognising the economic contribution of Scotland's defence sector. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I invite Murdo Fraser to speak to and move the motion.

16:02

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We are continually being invited by the Deputy First Minister to be positive about the Scottish economy and to celebrate success stories—indeed, we just heard that from her colleague, the finance secretary. I regard it as one of my purposes in life to try to make the Deputy First Minister happy. [*Laughter.*] That is why, this afternoon, we are going to do just as she wants and talk about the success and strength of the Scottish economy and, in particular, our vital defence sector. I hope that she and her Scottish National Party colleagues will be as enthusiastic as we are about that vital industry for Scotland.

Scotland's defence sector provides a considerable contribution to our economy. As of 2023-24, the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence spends almost £2.1 billion per year in Scotland—that is more per head of population in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.

We not only make military equipment for the UK here in Scotland; we export, very successfully. The total contribution of the aerospace defence and security industry to Scotland was estimated at £3.2 billion in 2022. That sector employs 35,000 people, including 1,500 apprentices.

Right across Scotland, we see companies providing high-quality, well paid jobs in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics sector. BAE Systems is building frigates on the Clyde for the Royal Navy and directly employing 2,700 people. At Rosyth and Faslane, Babcock is supporting more than 3,000 jobs.

Is it not something of an irony that we can have world-leading shipbuilding on the Clyde and at Rosyth, building ships for the Royal Navy, but the SNP Government cannot even supply two ferries from its nationalised shipyard at Port Glasgow?

We have Leonardo, known for many years to people in Edinburgh as Ferranti, building world-leading avionics and supplying radar systems for Lockheed Martin, among others. We have Thales, employing almost 800 people across two sites in Glasgow and Rosyth. In Glenrothes, which is in

my region, we have Raytheon building the javelin anti-tank missiles, which are being deployed so effectively right now by our brave Ukrainian allies, taking out the Russian tanks that are illegally invading their country. We should be proud of that.

We should celebrate those successes, but we should also recognise the opportunities for the future. Every western Government that is faced with the situation in Ukraine, instability in the middle east and an increasingly isolationist US Administration is devoting more resources to military spending. In last week's spending review, the Chancellor of the Exchequer promised that defence spending would rise from 2.3 per cent to 2.6 per cent of gross domestic product by 2027. If delivered, that will equate to an £11 billion uplift in spending, providing real opportunities for Scotland, not least in the upgrading of the nuclear submarine fleet at Faslane.

There are massive opportunities to grow our exports to nations across the world that are similarly increasing their defence spending, to earn more wealth for this country and create more jobs. Against that backdrop, we might expect the Scottish Government, which claims that it stands up for Scotland, to look to support the industry, seize those opportunities in full and create more jobs and apprenticeships. Instead, we see negativity and downright hostility.

One of the sector leaders, Rolls-Royce, planned to establish a specialist submarine welding facility on the Clyde—an £11 million investment to deliver a world-leading facility to support the construction and maintenance of the submarine fleet. That project had been in development for years and would have reduced costs, cut carbon emissions and created high-value jobs—just the sort of project that we should welcome and support. The project depended on a critical £2.5 million grant from Scottish Enterprise. However, the SNP decided that that grant could not be given, because of its policy of not funding "munitions". Shame on it, Presiding Officer.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Murdo Fraser is absolutely right. Does that situation not also stand in contrast with the attacks on our communications infrastructure in the North Sea, and is it not therefore absolutely critical that the UK Government has stepped in to provide that £2.5 million funding?

**Murdo Fraser:** Yes. I welcome the fact that the UK Government has stepped in, because those jobs and that investment would have gone elsewhere. Steve Carlier, president of submarines at Rolls-Royce, made it very clear:

"the project cannot continue, and the facility will not be built and resourced in Scotland".

If the UK Government has stepped in, that is good news, but it is no thanks to the SNP Government. The project did not involve weapons or munitions; it was simply the building of submarines. The SNP's approach is naive and immature.

The approach does not make any logical sense either. SNP policy is for Scotland to become independent. In that case, presumably, we would need armed forces, and those armed forces would need to be supplied with weaponry and equipment. Is the SNP really saying that, in that event, it wants all that to be imported rather than manufactured here, and the jobs to go elsewhere? None of that makes any sense.

What we see from the SNP is the politics of the student union, not of a grown-up Government that continually tells us that it is supportive of the Scottish economy and Scottish jobs. That is why the SNP needs to think again on its short-sighted and destructive policy. Scotland needs a grown-up Government, not one that is run by wannabe student politicians playing silly political games at the cost of real jobs and real wages. If the SNP cannot provide that leadership, it should step aside for the Scottish Conservatives, who will.

I have pleasure in moving,

That the Parliament recognises the significance of the defence industry to Scotland's economy, in providing secure, well-paid and highly skilled jobs and in driving innovation in the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) sector; notes that proposed increased spending on defence provides a substantial opportunity for growth; regrets that Scottish Government policy has meant that a Scottish Enterprise grant to support the Rolls-Royce specialist naval welding skills centre in Glasgow for submarine construction has been refused, and calls on the Scottish Government to drop the policy, which prevents public funds being invested in projects such as this.

16:09

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. I will try to cover quite a lot of ground in a limited time, but I will begin by stating plainly that Scotland's defence sector is of strategic importance to our economy, our communities and our shared security, and that is uppermost in our minds these days.

The sector supports more than 14,000 jobs, contributes £3.3 billion annually to our economy and plays a critical role in naval shipbuilding, aerospace and advanced technologies such as quantum and artificial intelligence. The innovation that is generated in those industries is vital not only for defence but for Scotland's wider industrial base. That is why the Scottish Government, through our enterprise agencies, has provided more than £90 million in support to companies in the aerospace, defence, marine and space sectors

since 2006. In recent years, we have supported major research and development projects in Rosyth, helped to secure hundreds of skilled jobs through training grants and enabled diversification into civilian and green technologies.

The Government stands behind the contribution that the defence sector makes to our economy and our national security. We also hold principled positions on how limited devolved public money is used. We have worked constructively with companies, such as BAE Systems, with deep roots in Scotland and major contributions to make. Our clear and long-standing policy is that scarce devolved public funds should not be used to directly support the manufacture of munitions. We are targeting Scotland's public support—

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Kate Forbes:** Members will appreciate that I think that my time has just been cut again and I want to cover quite a lot of space.

**Jackie Baillie:** On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer, could you give an indication of whether the cabinet secretary's time has been cut again?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can confirm that the cabinet secretary's time has not been cut, but it is still up to five minutes. I can give you the time back for that point of order, Deputy First Minister.

**Kate Forbes:** My apologies to Jackie Baillie. I had been anticipating slightly longer, so I am going to try to compress my comments; unfortunately, I now have even less time to do so.

We are targeting Scotland's public support towards innovation, training and economic diversification. For example, we have helped Leonardo to develop civilian radar and sensing technologies, we have supported Raytheon in expanding into commercial aerospace and we have backed Walker Precision Engineering in its aerospace and medical technologies.

We are not only investing in businesses but in people, especially our young people. Scotland's defence sector, like many others, depends on a skilled workforce, which is why the Government continues to make significant investments in science, technology, engineering and maths education and training. Last year alone, we invested more than £1.74 million in programmes that support the delivery of high-quality STEM learning in schools. We are supporting the future workforce through apprenticeships by backing around 25,500 new modern apprenticeships in 2025-26 and continuing to support more than 38,000 apprentices who are already in training,

many of whom are in STEM fields that are critical to Scotland's industrial future, including defence.

More than 80 per cent of apprentices in STEM start their training at higher levels, ensuring that we develop the advanced skills needed in high-tech sectors, including those that support aerospace, marine engineering and advanced manufacturing. We fund the young STEM leader programme, which has engaged more than 20,000 young people across every local authority in Scotland, and the STEM nation award programme, which has supported more than 8,800 teachers and almost 120,000 pupils in recognising and building excellence in STEM teaching.

We are embedding STEM in the heart of our education system and supporting our current economic sectors. That is future proofing our economy for decades to come. We are investing up to £2 million to develop engineering skills in the Glasgow city region in a programme designed by the Clyde maritime cluster in partnership with Skills Development Scotland, of which a key player is BAE Systems.

Just as we invest in the skills and technologies of the future, we must also ensure that our investment decisions reflect the kind of future that we want to build—one that is grounded in integrity and respect for human rights. That is why the Government signed up to the United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights and it is why our enterprise agencies operate a robust due diligence process to assess companies' human rights records before funding is approved.

That is why we voted for the Labour amendment that committed Scottish Enterprise to reviewing its human rights due diligence checks, and we plan to update Parliament on that before recess.

Defence is a reserved matter under the Scotland Act 1998. Where UK Government funding is provided directly for munitions manufacturing, that is its prerogative. It is a matter that the Opposition is quick to remind us of in relation to how we spend our budget. Our approach recognises that defence is hugely important. Scotland will continue to play a key role in supporting our allies, including Ukraine. Our support will focus on creating high-skilled, sustainable jobs and supporting innovation across the defence sector.

The defence sector is vital to our economy, and it will remain so. We will continue to invest in defence-related innovation, skills and infrastructure to build a defence economy that is fit for the future, productive and proud.

I move amendment S6M-17981.3, to leave out from “; notes” to end and insert:

“, and in protecting national security, especially at a time of increased global instability, and notes that defence is a matter reserved to the UK Government under the Scotland Act 1998 and that the Scottish Government's long-standing position is that public money should focus on diversification.”

16:15

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I welcome the statement that the Deputy First Minister made at the beginning of her speech underlining the importance of the defence sector. It is not the first time that she has made such a statement in the chamber, but—let us be plain—the statements that she and the First Minister have made in recent months are a change in position, and pretending otherwise is, frankly, just not being straightforward. I say that because I fear that some of the distinctions that the SNP draws in its amendment mean that it is still making some of the same mistakes. The distinction between munitions and other types of defence spending is a false one. It is also incorrect, at a time of acute and heightened global and geopolitical risk, to say that we should be divesting and diversifying away from defence industries and expenditure.

Let me explain why I think that both those points are wrong. Since the start of the Ukraine conflict—or the most recent phase of it, I should say—950,000 Russians have been wounded or have died, according to the most recent available figures. In response to that threat, the UK has afforded £12.8 billion of support. That has included tanks and air defence, including the development of the Gravehawk system, which has been carried out in conjunction with Denmark. We have provided long-range missiles and 30,000 drones and have trained 51,000 Ukrainian servicepeople.

The point is that that support has not just been systems, tanks or equipment—it has included munitions. In fact, it has depleted our stocks. Support of Ukraine and, presumably, defence of this country will require the manufacturing of munitions to take place. To make that distinction is, therefore, to make a very false and, in fact, dangerous distinction.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Daniel Johnson:** I am very happy to do so, but it will need to be brief.

**Edward Mountain:** I will keep it very brief. I will quote Patrick Harvie, which I do not do often:

“Scotland has strong solidarity with Ukraine and is outraged at those who would abandon it to an aggressor”—*[Official Report, 4 March 2025; c 16.]*

Surely, by not giving it arms, we are doing exactly that.



**Daniel Johnson:** I think that we are not taking our own defence seriously by not considering what we need to do in terms of restocking our munitions. My point is highlighted by the fact that treating the submarine welding facility as a munitions project is false. Submarines are not munitions.

The issue is not just about Ukraine—it is about the rest of the world. Look at the developments in the South China Sea, where China is increasingly testing internationally recognised boundaries. More recently, the situation in Iran is of grave concern. All that requires us to reflect on our defences and our defence requirements.

The issue is not just about traditional and orthodox military threats. In the past two years, the UK has received 90,000 cyberattacks from foreign actors, almost 90 of which have been of national significance. That is why the UK Government has brought forward the strategic defence review, with a commitment of a spending increase to 2.7 per cent of GDP, and that is why the defence industry in Scotland needs our support and our investment across every area. We do not want to split the sector neatly between reserved and devolved areas. That is explicit in the strategic defence review. The whole-society approach and, critically, the mobilisation of our industrial base will require devolved levers to be pulled.

To make a brief point on the Green amendment and the point about human rights checks, these things are not incompatible. If we want to increase our defence spending and support our allies, we need to enhance our human rights checks, because it is critical that we understand where our spending and arms are going and how those arms are being used. Those things are not incompatible. We cannot support the Green amendment nor the SNP amendment because, far from diversifying away from defence—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude—

**Daniel Johnson:** —we need to invest in it.

I move amendment S6M-17981.1, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the confirmation from the UK Government that it will provide the funding for the welding skills centre so that the project does not collapse; notes the contradiction in the Scottish Government’s policy, as the publicly owned Ferguson Marine shipyard is providing steel fabrication work for Type 26 frigates, and believes that this haphazard and misjudged policy is holding back the creation of jobs and economic growth in Scotland.”

16:20

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** As per our position in the previous debate, the Scottish Greens believe in progressive taxation as a way to

pool our collective resources and invest in the things that matter to all of us. An important principle of modern democracy is that voters should be able to see how their Governments are spending money; there should be transparency and accountability.

We know that, since 2019, at least £8 million of Scottish Enterprise grants have been awarded to companies that are involved in arms dealing and manufacturing. We also know that a number of those businesses have directly supplied weapons and military equipment to Israel during its assault on Gaza. Genocide, war crimes and more than 60,000 people killed—I hope that we would all agree that our Government should not be spending money to support those things.

Although I recognise that the Scottish Government does not provide grants for the manufacture of munitions, there is not a moral difference between supplying money to build bombs versus supplying money to build a bomb factory or a training facility to train bomb makers.

The principled point is very simple: if a company has profited from the sale of arms and weapons to countries that are complicit in war crimes and genocide, then it should not receive—*[Interruption.]* I will take interventions in my closing speech. Such a company should not receive public money from the Scottish Government.

In 2019, the Scottish Greens secured a commitment from the Scottish Government that all Scottish public bodies would conduct human rights checks on companies, including arms companies, prior to funding them. In November 2023, *The Ferret* revealed that, despite Scottish Enterprise having conducted 199 human rights checks, not a single firm had failed them, even though some have armed states that have been widely accused of war crimes, including Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Amnesty International has called the current human rights due diligence process “inadequate” and states that it

“is failing to ensure that Scotland upholds its international obligations.”

Still, to this day, no company has failed Scottish Enterprise’s human rights due diligence checks.

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Will Lorna Slater take an intervention?

**Lorna Slater:** I will take interventions during my closing speech.

The Scottish Government offered to review Scottish Enterprise’s human rights checks. While that has been going on, 10,000 more people have been killed in Gaza. The Scottish Government needs to urgently report on that review and provide Scottish Enterprise with a clear direction

on the use of public funds, to ensure that Scotland meets its international obligations.

Many of these companies, which supposedly need Government support, are reporting huge profits, with BAE Systems reporting £3 billion-worth of profits last year alone. It is not at all clear that the megacorporations that rake in that kind of profit need our public money. BAE Systems, Raytheon and Leonardo have all received grants from Scottish Enterprise. BAE Systems is already the biggest arms company in Europe, and Raytheon is the second biggest in the world.

Every pound of public money needs to be spent carefully to ensure the maximum return on that investment. We need to make sure that public money goes to building wealth in Scotland and tackling our biggest challenges: stopping the climate catastrophe and eliminating child poverty. We need to make sure that it does not go into the pockets of multinational megacorporation arms dealers—I cannot believe that I have to say that.

Scottish public money would be better spent on supporting small businesses, co-operative businesses, social enterprises and rural businesses. Scotland's small clean energy, nature restoration and organic food businesses would have made good use of that money, not to mention our NHS, trains and ferries.

Every pound of public money that is spent on the arms industry is a pound that is spent on misery, death and suffering. Scotland deserves better.

I move amendment S6M-17981.2, to leave out from “recognises” to end and insert:

“notes with concern that, despite the Scottish Government's policy that public funds to the defence industry should focus on diversification, at least £8 million of Scottish Enterprise grants have been awarded to companies involved in arms dealing and manufacturing since 2019; further notes that a number of these businesses have directly supplied weapons and military equipment to Israel during its assault on Gaza; understands that, despite this, still no company has failed Scottish Enterprise human rights due diligence checks, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to urgently report on its promised review of Scottish Enterprise's human rights checks before the summer recess and to provide Scottish Enterprise with a clear direction on the use of public funds to ensure that Scotland meets its international obligations.”

16:24

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I get slightly offended when people imply that we cannot be in favour of strong defences and in favour of a moral and ethical foreign policy. I think that we can do both, and the Liberal Democrats have said that we can do both. Ed Davey has made it clear that we should suspend arms exports to Israel. Not everybody will agree with

that position, but we have made it clear from the beginning that Israel has gone too far.

However, as Ed Davey has also made clear, we are in favour of having a strong defence back home, because we are on the north-west frontier of Europe. We are and will continue to be a key member of NATO, and that will be important for dealing with the threat of Russia, which provokes our defences almost every day of the week. We cannot pretend that, somehow, we are in a lazy backwater. We must have strong defences in this country. I favour that approach.

That leads me to the SNP's position, which is confusing. I have listened to Angus Robertson for years. I listened to him when he was at Westminster, when he would talk endlessly about the defence underspend in Scotland. He put a number on that—in 2011, he said that £5.6 billion less was being spent in Scotland than he believed the population share should have been, implying that the UK should have been spending more in Scotland.

We then had, for a number of years, an SNP position that was in favour of diversification away from defence products and against munitions. We get a slightly different position today, which is a bit more sympathetic in tone, but, fundamentally, is exactly the same position, which favours diversification and is against munitions. Even so, the SNP position is for Scotland to remain a member of NATO if it ever becomes an independent country. That is utterly confusing.

If we are to have any hope of getting any of the coming investment into Scotland, we need to clarify that. We need certainty not only for businesses and those who are seeking to invest but for those who are seeking to branch out into a new career or train for the first time. If they want to know whether to go into the defence sector, they need certainty on there being jobs and opportunities in it.

We need to have clarity, because whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the Labour UK Government, one thing is for sure: it will be spending a significantly increased sum of money on defence. There are many opportunities for workers, people, communities and businesses in Scotland to take advantage of that.

I know Rosyth dockyard particularly well—I used to represent that area. It has just launched a new type of frigate, which the workers are very proud of. A host of jobs in Port Glasgow, Prestwick, Edinburgh and Dundee, and communities across the country, depend on defence spending.

If we are to take advantage of the increased investment to defend our country, which I believe is right to come here, we will have to get it sorted with the Scottish Government. We must be clear

on exactly what its position is, because there is a danger that we will throw away the opportunity for growth. The last thing that we need is any further suppression of economic growth in Scotland. For the sake of our economy, for the sake of workers and for the sake of our defence, I plead with the Deputy First Minister to get that sorted.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

16:28

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** When the SNP is up to its neck in muck and bullets—although that might not be an appropriate term, given its attitude towards bullets—it sends for Kate Forbes, who has the capacity to dress up the most ludicrous policy positions with sweet reason. By George, she tried today, but she failed. Whatever way we look at the Scottish Government's policy position on the issue, it is ridiculous. That is the only word—ridiculous.

Stewart McDonald, a former SNP MP who has done a bit of work to try to civilise the SNP's attitude towards the defence of the realm, tweeted—or whatever it is now—on X this morning. He said:

"There's a defence industry debate in"

the Scottish Parliament

"today. Having worked hard on defence policy for my party when an MP, it pains me to see we are not evolving with the serious times we live in."

Stewart McDonald went on to say that he sees nothing in Murdo Fraser's motion or in Daniel Johnson's amendment that he cannot support. Then he said:

"We"—

I presume that he means the SNP—

"should be more ambitious in our support of Scotland's domestic defence sector".

He said that the SNP is

"treating ... national defence industries like a dirty secret".

That is the reality of the position that Kate Forbes has been sent out to defend today, with nobody daring to sit beside her. It is an impossible and ridiculous policy. It is ideological nonsense. It is hostility to a sector that, in the Deputy First Minister's words, is a strategic necessity, provides secure, high-quality jobs and drives innovation in STEM, which is what Scotland needs.

**Daniel Johnson:** Does the member agree that the view that we should seek to defend our country should be a patriotic view, regardless of our view on the constitution? Our view on defending our people and country should be

regardless of our view on what Scotland should do.

**Stephen Kerr:** I could not agree more with Daniel Johnson. It is about a patriotic duty. It might not be fashionable in the SNP, or in the Scottish Greens, to talk about patriotic duty, but that is exactly what this is about.

The SNP claims to stand with Ukraine and it claims to care about national security. The SNP loves the rhetoric, yet its actions, which always speak louder than words, undermine the very sector that makes the munitions and builds the ships and systems that will help Ukraine to win and help Britain and our allies to defend ourselves. Nowhere is that hypocrisy more grotesque than in the saga of the NHS equipment donation to Ukraine. The SNP Government boasted about that gesture, only for it to be revealed last weekend that it had stipulated that the equipment must not be used to treat wounded Ukrainian soldiers.

That defies all common decency, let alone common sense. Imagine telling a Ukrainian medic in a field hospital that they can use the equipment to treat civilians but not the soldier lying next to them with a catastrophic injury. That is ideological dogma gone mad, and it is not neutrality—it is ideological extremism dressed up as moral superiority.

It is a morally incoherent stance that insults our allies, weakens our national resilience and strengthens our enemies, as well as betraying our duties as a member of NATO. It is absurd, morally bankrupt and strategically reckless. The SNP Government must drop its policy of excluding defence projects from public support. The Parliament should send a clear message that Scotland backs our armed forces, stands with our allies and supports the industries that keep us safe and free. Anything less is a betrayal of our responsibilities at home and abroad.

16:33

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** Scotland's defence sector, which covers aerospace, defence and security, is valued at £3.2 billion and directly supports more than 33,000 jobs. I acknowledge the sector's importance, although I believe that it should, over time, diversify towards commercial activities, ensuring that Scotland remains a hub for manufacturing and innovation. However, what I cannot accept is that parts of Scotland's defence industry are manufacturing components such as systems for the Paveway smart bombs that are used by the Israeli air force in Gaza.

A 2021 investigation by *The Ferret* website revealed that Scottish defence companies have supplied components for Israel's F-16 and F-35

aircraft, rocket systems and engines for G550 surveillance aircraft, all of which are likely to have been deployed over Gaza. Over the past decade, the UK Government has licensed hundreds of millions of pounds in arms exports to Israel, including bombs, drones, grenades, small arms, tanks and missiles.

Despite public pressure, the UK Labour Government has suspended fewer than 10 per cent of arms export licences to Israel. I urge the UK Government to halt all defence-related export licences to Israel until the killing of Palestinians stops.

What is happening in Palestine reminds me of how, from 1974 to 1978, the workers at the Rolls-Royce factory in East Kilbride refused to work on Chilean air force plane parts because of the atrocities that were being committed by the Pinochet dictatorship. That boycott—a powerful act of solidarity with the people of Chile—grounded half of Chile’s air force, as the film “Nae Pasaran” documents. It is time that trade unions across the UK took a similar stance to those East Kilbride workers 50 years ago in order to stop the genocide that is being committed by Israel.

Defence is an important sector, but it is important to recognise the size of the industry, as it accounts for just over 2 per cent of Scotland’s economy, as measured by gross value added, and is worth 5 per cent of the UK’s £62 billion defence budget. Thankfully, Scotland’s economy is diverse and resilient, and non-defence sectors drive nearly 98 per cent of GVA. All key parts of Scotland’s economy—land use, energy, construction and non-defence manufacturing—are worth more than, or equal, the defence sector’s contribution.

As with most parts of the UK, Scotland’s economy depends on the service sector. Individual sectors—such as information and communications; finance and insurance; professional, scientific and technical research; tourism and hospitality; retail and wholesaling; real estate; health; and education—are worth more to the Scottish economy than the defence sector is when it comes to GVA. I welcome the support that the Scottish Government provides in order to encourage that continued diversity. I also welcome the fact that, since it was first elected, the Scottish Government has invested £45 million in companies that are involved in defence contracts.

The motion refers to a Scottish Enterprise grant that was not awarded to Rolls-Royce to support

“specialist naval welding”

training

“for submarine construction”.

However, it overlooks the fact that most expenditure and work on the nuclear submarines

will occur in Barrow-in-Furness in north-west England. It also fails to note the Scottish Government’s £2 million investment in engineering skills in the Glasgow city region, which was developed by the Clyde maritime cluster in partnership with Skills Development Scotland. I question why Rolls-Royce Holdings, which has a turnover of £18.9 billion and £2.5 billion in net profit, requires public funding of £2.5 million for a skills centre to fulfil its contracts.

16:37

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)**

**(Con):** I am delighted to stand up and speak in the debate, even if it is to highlight some of the incredible things that I hear other parties saying. First, I put on the record that the MOD is a very important contributor to Scotland. It invests huge amounts of money—more than £2 billion a year—and our arms exports and weapons exports are incredibly important. I do not need to point out to members that Lossiemouth, which is in the region that I represent, has just benefited from a Boeing investment of more than £100 million.

I am sorry that Daniel Johnson is not in the chamber, but I recognise what he said about the importance of investing in our armed services and what the Labour Party is doing. I was pleased to hear him say that because, for too long, our armed services have been cut down. When I was a soldier, there were 138,000 soldiers in Germany; now, in the UK, fewer than 60,000 can be deployed. I am also pleased that the Scottish Labour amendment identifies that, without the type 26 frigate programme, Ferguson Marine would not be able to rely on having a future.

I struggle with the SNP’s policy, which is that the party supports diversifying from defence expenditure and defence industries but likes defence. It seems to me that you cannot have the two.

I would be delighted if Lorna Slater asked AI to articulate the Scottish Greens’ policies, because they seem completely incoherent. It seems that they support delivering first-field dressings to Ukraine but not giving soldiers the ability to defend themselves on the battlefield, which is ludicrous.

Let me be entirely clear: I believe that the first duty of every Government is ensuring the security of the country and the population. That will not be achieved by giving hugs and kisses to those who threaten us.

Let me be clear that the only place in the world that has benefited from a flower power revolution is Portugal, in 1974, when soldiers put carnations in their guns to prove that they were not going to fire at civilians. Every other country has to use bullets to defend itself and fight against

aggression. Countries need weapons to defend themselves, and they need to be confident that their politicians will give them the ability to defend themselves.

In very short and simple terms, our armed forces need to walk softly but carry a stick in order to defend us against the growing turbulence across the world. One has only to look at Iran, North Korea, Russia and China as central places where division is being sowed.

I highlight some of the comments that we have heard about Ukraine. I will quote Lorna Slater and see whether she will stand up to defend this. On 5 March 2025, she said:

“Support for Ukraine is wide and deep. Not since the end of the cold war have Europe’s values been tested as they are being tested now. In the face of Russia’s aggression, however, we are resolute.”—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2025; c 93.]

We are resolute, but we do not seem to be resolute in providing Ukraine with the ability to defend itself. That is a completely mixed message.

John Swinney stood before us and said:

“Here in Scotland, we will, forever, stand with Ukraine.”—[*Official Report*, 4 March 2025; c 13.]

We will stand with Ukraine, but we will not defend it or allow it to defend itself.

Those are the sorts of mixed messages that we get. I have lots of other examples of that for lots of SNP members who have not turned up to the debate. The SNP wishes to diversify rather than defend the country. Let me say, as an ex-soldier, that that is pure hypocrisy and not understandable.

16:42

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to speak in the debate, and I second the amendment in the name of my colleague Mr Johnson. It is a very sensible amendment and I encourage the Government to support it in full, as Stewart McDonald, the former SNP defence spokesperson, has indicated it should. He provides cogent analysis that we can have an ethical policy on arms export sales—there is cross-party consensus in that regard—withstanding the need for serious and robust investment in this country’s defence capabilities. Ultimately, that is what this debate is about.

Scotland contributes a great deal to the UK’s defence and to NATO’s defence collectively. That is never more the case than through our shipbuilding industry, in which I worked prior to my election to the Parliament—indeed, I believe that I am the only serving parliamentarian in Scotland who has a background in the shipbuilding industry. I also had the opportunity to serve as a Scottish Enterprise account manager for two years, during

which time I worked with businesses—mainly, small and medium-sized enterprises—across the aerospace, defence and marine sectors in Scotland. Therefore, I have a fairly deep understanding of the potential of Scotland’s defence and maritime industries, and I am increasingly concerned by the hostility that is expressed towards them by the Government.

A recent example was the Government denying Rolls-Royce a support grant to establish a naval welding centre at the Scottish Government-supported National Manufacturing Institute in Inchinnan and to replenish the space at Rolls-Royce that has been vacant for some years since the end of the maintenance, repair and overhaul activity. That was a huge opportunity for high-value manufacturing development in Scotland, but the Scottish Government spurned that opportunity to crowd in investment in an area that desperately needs it. I am really grateful that the UK Government has stepped in to offer alternative grant funding to ensure that the project goes ahead, but that should provide the Scottish Government with a reality check on its position. We need those industries and we need to support them.

In the past, the Government in Scotland has supported our shipbuilding industry. For example, a £360,000 grant was provided for the applied shipbuilding skills academy at Scotstoun, which is a great asset not just for BAE Systems but for the country’s wider shipbuilding ecosystem. When I worked at BAE Systems, we regularly collaborated with Ferguson Marine—indeed, the only thing that is keeping Ferguson Marine operational today is subcontract work on the fabrication of steel units for the type 26 frigate programme. It is rather ironic, therefore, that the Government’s amendment to today’s motion is about diversification away from defence at a time when the Government is engaged in precisely the opposite—it is increasing its dependence on defence work to sustain commercial shipbuilding activity on the Clyde. We could, of course, go into detail about public procurement reform and the need for support to increase ferry production, but that is perhaps off the topic of the debate.

I encourage the Government not only to reflect on the emerging consensus—the reality of geopolitics in Europe, the need for security, the need to defend our country—but to recognise the immense contribution of shipbuilding in Glasgow and the wider Clydeside area, which is still the region’s largest manufacturing employer. Quite frankly, some of the comments from back benchers, which cast aspersions on the industry, were absolutely disgraceful. The facilities are not bomb factories and the funding cannot come from the largesse of those companies alone. The Government should engage and be proactive with

and supportive of those industries, not dismissive of them.

The message that is going out to more than 4,500 people who work in shipbuilding in Glasgow and the west of Scotland needs to be much more positive and supportive of that industry and must recognise the immense value and wealth that it creates for our country. Although the Government explored those opportunities for diversification, its industrial policy is so incoherent that it is actually driving commercial shipbuilding opportunities away rather than in.

Immense opportunities exist to work in collaboration across the industry. Indeed, I chair the cross-party group on maritime and shipbuilding—which several members attend—where we are looking at those opportunities. It would be helpful if the Government made its defence support policy much better and much more rational instead of reactionary. The need for sure ethical safeguards for defence export sales should not be met at the expense of the need to build up our defence industry. We are an island nation and we need a navy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Paul Sweeney:** That is fairly axiomatic.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Sweeney. Paul McLennan will be the final speaker in the open debate.

16:46

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** This debate is taking place at a time of heightened tensions in many parts of the world. My thoughts are with those people who are suffering from the many wars and conflicts that are raging at the moment. Too many innocent people are being killed. As a Parliament, we have the responsibility not to further inflame conflicts by funding the manufacturers of munitions—indeed, the Scottish Government and its agencies have a long-standing policy that public money should not support the manufacturers of munitions.

The Scottish Government has produced robust guidance for its executive agencies and public bodies on how they should undertake due diligence on businesses before establishing an investment relationship. I will touch on that in a second.

Scottish Enterprise has been clear that its human rights due diligence checks are regularly reviewed and updated in line with its most recent guidance. I am aware of the review that is under way, which must be robust and as extensive as possible.

In the chamber last night, we discussed the horrors of the current situation in Gaza, where 55,000 Palestinians have been killed by the barbarism of the Israeli regime. Israel has had help with weapons and munitions from the UK and the US. That must stop. We must be unequivocal about this: the UK Government must stop supplying arms to Israel. In Scotland, we must ensure that no Scottish Enterprise funding finds its way to supporting companies that provide munitions to Israel.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Paul McLennan:** I will not—I have only four minutes.

The Scottish Government values the role of the defence sector in Scotland, the many jobs that it supports and sustains, and the value that it adds to the Scottish economy. Public money that Scottish enterprise agencies use is focused on supporting companies that are wholly or partially involved in defence activities with skills development and diversification. That ensures that Scotland continues to support and secure jobs in the defence, aerospace and shipbuilding sectors and the work that they do.

I will move on to some of the specifics of the debate. On the specifics of the motion, Scottish Enterprise considered that the project that it had been discussing with Rolls-Royce in partnership with the Malin Group for work on an attack submarine was unfortunately ineligible for potential funding. Scottish Enterprise did not receive a formal application for funding from Malin.

The Scottish Government provides business support via enterprise agencies to companies that operate in defence markets. Since the Scottish Government came to office, £45 million-worth of support has been allocated through enterprise agencies to defence companies or companies that are partially involved in defence activities. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of aerospace, defence and the shipbuilding sectors to Scotland's economy and is committed to ensuring that Scotland is the home of manufacturing and innovation. Scottish ministers continue to engage with industries across the country as part of that work, including through our support for defence markets, diversification into civilian markets, training support and job creation.

The defence sector not only is critical to our national security but is a strategic driver of Scotland's future workforce. As Gordon MacDonald mentioned, the Scottish Government is also investing up to £2 million in developing engineering skills in the Glasgow city region, working with the Clyde maritime cluster.

In conclusion, we will hear—we have heard already today—people say that the Scottish Government does not support the defence sector. As I have outlined in my short speech, the Scottish Government has funded and will continue to fund the defence sector in Scotland. The proposal from Rolls-Royce and the Malin Group for work on an attack submarine was, unfortunately, ineligible for the potential funding. The Scottish Government has a long-standing policy of not providing funding for munitions—the decision that was made by Scottish Enterprise on the matter demonstrated that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I note that Mr Rennie is not in the chamber, despite having participated earlier. I will expect an apology and an explanation for that.

16:50

**Lorna Slater:** My apologies to fellow members for not taking interventions during my opening speech. I just wanted to get my remarks on the record, and I will be very happy to take interventions during my closing speech.

In response to Edward Mountain, I say that there is complete coherence in my remarks. I fully support my previous remarks on Ukraine and its fight against an oppressor in Russia's illegal war. That does not send a mixed message on how we use public funding.

**Edward Mountain:** If Lorna Slater's remarks were completely coherent, how will Ukraine defend itself against Russia if it does not have any weapons with which to do so? Is it just supposed to hug and kiss it out?

**Lorna Slater:** Mr Mountain will have heard my opening speech, which neither mentioned Ukraine nor condemned arms sales to Ukraine. What it condemned was public money being used to fund companies that are selling arms to countries that are committing war crimes. I know that Mr Mountain is an ethical person and that he would not condone war crimes. I would not support companies that are profiting from creating war crimes with public money.

**Jackson Carlaw:** I have heard Scottish Green politicians say that the United Kingdom itself commits war crimes. Is it the Scottish Greens' position that the United Kingdom Government should not be supplying weapons to itself?

**Lorna Slater:** It is a bizarre proposal that Mr Carlaw puts to me. Clearly, no country should be committing war crimes. A country needing to defend itself from an illegal invasion, such as that of Russia, is a different matter to what the UK Government is currently doing, which is being complicit in a genocide that is being committed by

Israel. We need to call that out when we see it. The UK should not be supplying weapons, munitions or intelligence to countries that are committing war crimes. That should go without saying.

**Daniel Johnson:** Lorna Slater says that we should be supporting Ukraine. Does that include supplying munitions to that country? Therefore, should we be supporting the manufacturing of munitions on that basis?

**Lorna Slater:** That was not the subject of my speech. My opening remarks were specifically about the use of public funding to support massive corporations. The question is whether we give public money to massive corporations that are making billions from selling to countries that are committing war crimes. That is the topic to which I restricted my remarks. I note that BAE Systems, Raytheon and Leonardo—all of which rake in massive profits—are likely to do even more of that, whether or not I have an opinion on it, because of the instability that exists in the world. The sums that they are being given by the Scottish Government through Scottish Enterprise would be better spent on building wealth in Scotland, rather than on companies that are profiting from suffering around the world.

**Paul Sweeney:** *[Made a request to intervene.]*

**Lorna Slater:** I will take an intervention from Paul Sweeney.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I cannot give you all of that time back.

**Lorna Slater:** That is fine.

**Paul Sweeney:** I want to ask about a particular example. The £360,000 Scottish Enterprise grant that has been given to BAE Systems to create the applied shipbuilding skills academy in my region of Glasgow is a positive in my view. Does Lorna Slater agree?

**Lorna Slater:** It is not at all clear to me that corporations such as BAE Systems, Raytheon and Leonardo, which are raking in billions, need the money. They have their own deep pockets. Why take money away from projects that would benefit us in Scotland? That is money that is not being spent on our NHS or on developing wealth for our communities in Scotland. Every bit of public money comes with choices, and the Scottish Government should choose to spend that money wisely and on matters that improve things in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I now call Jackie Baillie. You have up to four minutes, Ms Baillie.

16:54

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Four minutes is not a lot of time in which to sum up the debate, so let me get straight to the point and start with the wise words of Stewart McDonald, the former MP who used to be the SNP's spokesperson on defence. He has already been referenced by Stephen Kerr, but this is well worth repeating. This is what he said:

"Having worked hard on defence policy for my party when an MP, it pains me to see we are not evolving with the serious times we live in."

Stewart McDonald, who is the SNP expert on defence, is absolutely right. In these uncertain times, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, and now the war between Israel and Iran, the world is now undoubtedly a less stable place. It is therefore the most important task of any Government to provide security for the country and its people.

Mr McDonald had more to say. He said that we should be more ambitious in our support of Scotland's domestic defence sector, while still maintaining our commitment to good human rights practice. Indeed, he said all that in the policy paper "Think Like a State, Act Like a State". Despite John Swinney's recent rhetoric about dusting down his aspiration for independence, the SNP's attitude to defence clearly demonstrates that it is incapable of the grown-up thinking and action required. Instead, the defence industries are treated like a dirty little secret and, as we now know, the SNP would send forces personnel into the field with peashooters.

That is what lies behind the bonkers decision on Rolls-Royce. There was almost universal astonishment that the SNP Government withheld a grant of £2.5 million to Rolls-Royce for a welding centre. Why? In so far as I understand its thinking, it was because the people being trained might work on the construction of a submarine, which has munitions on it. The training opportunities and the good jobs that Rolls-Royce would have provided for people in west and central Scotland should have been welcomed. So, too, should the investment by the Malin Group in establishing a marine technology park in West Dunbartonshire.

**Lorna Slater:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackie Baillie:** No.

Apparently, it is SNP Government policy not to fund any jobs relating to munitions—a policy that is not fit for the world as it is now, a policy based on ideology, not security, and a policy that is inconsistently applied.

**Lorna Slater:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackie Baillie:** No.

Can the cabinet secretary explain to me why Ferguson's shipyard, which is owned and funded by the SNP Government, is able to do contract work for BAE Systems, which builds warships? Just in case she did not know, warships have munitions on them. Thank goodness that John Healey, Labour's Secretary of State for Defence, has said that he will step in, because the SNP has failed to step up.

Conscious of the time and drawing my remarks to a close, I welcome the strategic defence review. I very much welcome the investment that has been brought forward by a UK Labour Government: billions of pounds for improved housing for forces personnel and for new submarines, which will have a direct and positive impact on His Majesty's naval base Clyde in my constituency. I am very grateful to those at the base, both serving personnel and staff, who are working for partners such as Babcock, which, through their efforts, contribute to the security of our country. We need to equip them to do their job, however.

Defence might be reserved, but growing the economy, investing in manufacturing and providing skills and training are all devolved and the responsibility of the Scottish Government. The SNP has lost sight of that. Instead, it wants to play student politics. It is simply not serious. It is time for change.

16:58

**Kate Forbes:** At the outset of my closing remarks, let me speak once again about the importance that we place on Scotland's defence sector, which plays a vital role—

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Will the Deputy First Minister take an intervention?

**Kate Forbes:** I will take an intervention, early though it is in my speech.

**Craig Hoy:** I thank the Deputy First Minister for giving way. Does she not accept that the debate has exposed the credibility issue that the SNP now has with business? In quiet meetings, the SNP gives businesses warm words, be they about hospitality—with hotels struggling with the implementation of the visitor levy—or about the Scottish defence industry. Is it the case that the very few pro-business ministers lack influence in the Government, or is it the reality that they are not as pro-business as they make out?

**Kate Forbes:** That was more speech than intervention. The ironic thing about the debate is that we have parties on both sides of us making directly contradictory accusations about the Scottish Government. Both cannot be true.



That is why I am happy to set out the Scottish Government's position. There is an added irony, particularly from Craig Hoy, but from across the Conservatives, who frequently accuse the Scottish Government of spending too much money in areas that are undoubtedly reserved under the Scotland Act 1998. We will remember this debate the next time that they accuse us of doing that.

The defence sector is a cornerstone of high-value manufacturing in this country, supporting more than 14,000 jobs and contributing £3.3 billion annually to our economy through world-class capabilities in shipbuilding, aerospace and advanced technologies.

The one point on which I would agree with colleagues across the chamber is in identifying the strengths of those industries here in Scotland. That is precisely why we have invested considerable funding to support innovation, workforce training and the wider industrial base—another point that has been sorely missing from Opposition speeches. That is also why we continue to support firms as they evolve, ensuring that Scotland retains and grows its share of defence, aerospace and shipbuilding work, with all the economic and employment benefits that brings.

In my engagement with the sector—

**Murdo Fraser:** Will the Deputy First Minister take an intervention?

**Kate Forbes:** I will finish this point and then, if I have time, I will bring the member in.

In my engagement with the sector, which I am delighted to see Craig Hoy recognise, the point is made to me repeatedly about the skills that are required in an area of growth. That is an area where the Scottish Government undoubtedly has responsibility, and I am actively engaged in ensuring that there is a pipeline of people and skills. *[Interruption.]* Having already promised Murdo Fraser, I would not want to cut him off by taking another intervention.

We have to invest in the pipeline of skills, and we are investing in that future pipeline, including the £185 million to support apprenticeships.

I will take the intervention from Murdo Fraser.

**Murdo Fraser:** I wonder whether the Deputy First Minister can clarify one point that has come up during the debate: how does the construction and maintenance of a submarine meet the definition of munitions?

**Kate Forbes:** Scottish Enterprise reviewed the opportunity—a formal application was not made—and concluded that it was not consistent with the policy. *[Interruption.]*

The investment that we are making is helping to secure a resilient and future-ready workforce—

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Kate Forbes:** I am just about to close.

It is a workforce that will continue to drive economic value and support Scotland's place at the forefront of innovation and manufacturing excellence.

17:02

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** I will start by congratulating Murdo Fraser on the comprehensive programme of defence industries that he identified in his speech.

I also congratulate Daniel Johnson, Paul Sweeney, Edward Mountain and Jackie Baillie on what I thought were first-class, direct speeches that spoke to the very heart of the issue of the defence of this country.

I also pay tribute to the hero of this afternoon's proceedings, Angus Robertson, who was, in fact, the only member of the Government who was prepared to sit beside the Deputy First Minister. I watched Fiona Hyslop come in, note that the Deputy First Minister was sitting on her own, unsupported, on the front bench, and bravely sit in the row behind her.

I am reminded of when it used to be that the slogan of the Scottish Government was "Stronger for Scotland". Well, the last time that it was stronger for Scotland's defences was when Derek Mackay sat on the front bench as its financial spokesman and actively campaigned on behalf of Thales in Govan for the ground-support vehicles that were needed to be manufactured here in Scotland, and, no doubt, deployed in the defence of this country.

The Scottish Government could take the advice of someone such as Stewart McDonald, who sat with Mr Robertson at the Palace of Westminster, where he spoke knowledgeably on defence matters, and who is now clearly at war with his own back-bench friends here in the Scottish Parliament. However, instead of his advice, the Scottish Government is now taking the advice of the Scottish Greens.

Here is the nub of the issue, as far as I am concerned: how can the Scottish Government contemplate advice from the Greens, who, when we had a reception in Parliament during apprenticeship week for more than 100 16-year-olds working in a whole diverse section of the defence industries in this country, had Ross Greer on a megaphone outside this Parliament condemning them and egging on those who were

pushing, shoving and spitting at them and accusing them of committing genocide? How is that supportable?

Let us face it—the Scottish Greens are against Britain’s defence industries. They have accused Britain of committing war crimes. Ross Greer has talked about the war crimes of Churchill. The Greens talk about the war crimes of the UK Government, all the way through to the present Government. They talk about the need to be transparent, but in order to be transparent, it is necessary to be free, and in order to be free, it is necessary to have strong defences that allow us to defend our own country.

Fifty years after a politician said that one’s first duty to freedom is to defend one’s own and acquired the sobriquet of the “Iron Lady” for her trouble, Lorna Slater looks to Kate Forbes and tells her that, instead, she should stand before our enemies and posture as the organic food lady. What possible defence of our country would that represent?

**Lorna Slater:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackson Carlaw:** I will, since Ms Slater was gracious enough to give way—eventually.

**Lorna Slater:** Is the member trying to suggest that Winston Churchill did not commit war crimes?

**Jackson Carlaw:** I think that that stands as a helpful example of why the Scottish Government should think twice about any association with the Scottish Greens.

We are talking about the Scottish Government’s lack of investment in the Rolls-Royce potential in the Clyde. I heard Mairi Gougeon say—unbelievably—that the Government is in favour of Scotland’s defence industries and its armed forces, because we need to defend ourselves, but that it is not in favour of giving our armed forces anything to defend themselves with. That is a completely unacceptable position.

In 1989, when the Berlin wall fell, perhaps there were grounds for putting on rose-tinted spectacles. Maybe we were briefly seduced by the kind of world that we thought we might all be going to live in, but the world is evolving around us right now. We should celebrate the fact that we have leading defence industries here in Scotland that employ the very best of our young people at the forefront of technology. We need to get behind them and be part of the defence of this country and the free world.

## Business Motion

17:07

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-18003, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I invite Jamie Hepburn to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 June 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Budget - Provisional Outturn 2024-2025

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Education (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

10.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 25 June 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business; Justice and Home Affairs

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: The Scottish Government’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan

*followed by* Stage 3 Debate: Education (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Employment Rights Bill - UK Legislation

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill - UK Legislation

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill - UK Legislation

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Absent Voting (Elections in Scotland and Wales) Bill - UK Legislation

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.50 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members’ Business

Thursday 26 June 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Education and Skills  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Ensuring the  
 Right Support for Young People's  
 Neurodivergence, Mental Health and  
 Wellbeing  
*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Product  
 Regulation and Metrology Bill - UK  
 Legislation  
*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Public  
 Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery)  
 Bill - UK Legislation  
*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Children's  
 Wellbeing and Schools Bill - UK  
 Legislation  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 4.55 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Tuesday 2 September 2025

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 3 September 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Deputy First Minister Responsibilities,  
 Economy and Gaelic;  
 Finance and Local Government  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 4 September 2025

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:  
 Net Zero and Energy, and Transport  
*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 23 June 2025, 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.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:07

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-18004, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I invite Jamie Hepburn to move the motion on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland (Designation of Scheme Administrator) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

17:08

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Although we will support the SSI, we have serious concerns about what has been put in front of us and the lack of detail that we are being asked to approve. I raised those concerns at committee, and I will go through some of them again today.

There is no detail on the level of deposit or who can alter it; on the different deposit rates for different sized containers; or on the level of producer registration fees. There is a lack of detail on closed-loop premises and no mention of the costs for or impact on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, or of the rural exemptions and coverage.

Today, we are being asked to approve a deposit return scheme that excludes glass. I do not have a problem with that, but I have a problem with the amount of taxpayer money that has been wasted to get us to this point. We could have launched a deposit return scheme that did not include glass two years ago, because an exemption from the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 was granted. If we had done that, the system administrator would not have collapsed with debts of £86 million, a big chunk of which was made up of Scottish taxpayers' cash that had been lent through the Scottish National Investment Bank. All of that has been lost. We would not be in a position in which Biffa is taking legal action against the Scottish Government for £166 million. If it is successful, that will mean that less money will be available for our national health service, for policing and for our schools.

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** The member omits from his remarks that the United Kingdom Government granted very limited exemptions to the internal market act, one of the conditions of which was that the deposit not be determined—not only that the plastic be removed but, specifically, that the deposit not be determined.

It is not possible to launch a deposit return scheme without knowing what the deposit is, so the member is not being accurate in how he represents the reasons why the internal market act prevented the launch of Scotland's scheme.

**Douglas Lumsden:** I thank Lorna Slater for that intervention—the system's administrator Circularicity Scotland was clear that it was happy enough for the scheme to take place.

If that had gone ahead, we would not have been in the situation in which we have lost so much money—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear one another.

**Douglas Lumsden:** —and we have got such big exposure from Biffa.

One must ask oneself: why is the devolved Government happy to have a DRS that excludes glass now, but to have ditched its own scheme—at huge cost to the Scottish taxpayer—back in 2023? The only logical presumption is that not to go ahead in 2023, at huge cost to taxpayers, was to generate grievance. To create grievance, at huge cost to the taxpayer, just shows what a disgusting organisation the Scottish National Party is.

When it comes to net zero, this devolved Government is all talk. It is happy for diesel-fuelled lorries to take our waste to England at huge cost to our taxpayers. Eighteen months ago, the SNP boasted that world leaders would be calling it, asking for advice on net zero. The only people who are phoning it now are waste companies in England asking for contracts. What an incompetent Government it is. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you—members, let us carry out our proceedings in an atmosphere of courtesy and respect. I call Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, to respond.

17:11

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** I thank the member for the further opportunity to discuss the draft deposit return scheme designation order. To Mr Carlaw, I point out that I have been preparing to answer this question on behalf of my colleague, Ms Martin—who is on Government business elsewhere—in a quieter spot than the noise of the Opposition front benches.

This instrument, if approved, will confirm UK Deposit Management Organisation Ltd—UK DMO Ltd—as the scheme administrator for Scotland's DRS and set out its obligations and functions. As an industry-led scheme, the operation, design and delivery of Scotland's DRS is the responsibility of a scheme administrator. This order provides the

scheme administrator with the powers needed to make decisions about how the scheme should run, such as to set the level of the deposit and operate an effective return point network. It also places requirements on the scheme administrator to meet the scheme's targets, to act on behalf of industry and to protect consumers.

Organisations were invited to apply to be the DRS's administrator in Scotland; we received a single, industry-backed application from UK DMO Ltd. Following assessment of that application, Scottish ministers have put forward UK DMO Ltd as the scheme administrator for Scotland, and it is named as such in the order. The same organisation has been appointed as the scheme administrator in England and Northern Ireland, ensuring that there is a consistent approach to delivery across the three nations.

UK DMO Ltd is a private company made up of member organisations from across industry. I am pleased that it has wasted no time in preparing for the role. It has written to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee to express strong support for the scheme, outline the work that it is already undertaking to prepare for the scheme's implementation, and emphasise its commitment to implementing a DRS that works for everyone, from the largest producers to the smallest shops in island communities.

This order will enable an industry-led DRS in Scotland and ensure consistent delivery of DRS across Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. I urge members to approve the instrument.

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

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-18005, on the approval of an SSI. I ask Jamie Hepburn to move the motion on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

17:14

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I want to make clear that deposit return schemes can have a positive effect on the recycling rates for those items in the scheme, and a limited effect on overall recycling rates.

The schemes work well and successfully across the globe but not in Scotland, although it is worth while pointing out that Scotland—indeed, the UK—would be the first to introduce such a scheme with advanced kerbside recycling. I appreciate that the cabinet secretary is not directly responsible for the scheme as it is now, but we nevertheless have a

duty in this place to stand up for Scotland's interests, and I have several concerns.

The legislation that is before us has a registration application date before 1 August 2027; however, what if the scheme were to be delayed? Scheme materials are exempt from extended producer responsibility for packaging, which means that non-scheme articles will pay. That will be particularly challenging if there is a delay. Local authorities will lose at least £1,500 per tonne on dry mixed recyclates. How will they be compensated? How will kerbside collections be affected? What will be the impact on local authority recycling rates? Will there be job losses?

How will small independent retailers be supported—for example, by accessing reverse vending machines or incentive schemes? I note the exemption. What will that mean for using glass as a packaging product, particularly as we have a glass recycling plant in Scotland? Will Scottish waste-management small and medium-sized enterprises be part of the scheme and be able to bid to access that waste? Will waste that is collected in Scotland be allocated UK wide? That means that Scotland will not have an opportunity to utilise the value of that waste and, for example, set up plastic recycling facilities.

Perhaps the cabinet secretary would raise that with the UK Government. I have been unable to obtain a meeting.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Fiona Hyslop, cabinet secretary—

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. From my hearing of what the cabinet secretary said, she told Parliament that there is representation from small businesses on the board of UK DMO board. I believe that not to be true—the reason being that the Scottish Grocers Federation, which sought to be on that board, was refused, and its contention is that there is no small business representation on the board, despite the fact that small grocery shops around the UK do not have the space to put in reverse vending machines and do not have the logistical capacity to deal viably with the scheme, and that all the flaws—I believe that there are around 40—in the Scottish scheme are manifest in the UK scheme. If it is the case that the cabinet secretary has misinformed the Parliament, what remedies do I have to correct that important error?

**The Presiding Officer:** As an experienced member, Mr Ewing will be aware of the mechanisms that exist and of the fact that the content of members' contributions is not ordinarily a matter for the chair. We will continue. I call the cabinet secretary.

17:18

**Fiona Hyslop:** I thank Maurice Golden for the opportunity to again discuss the draft Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Amendment Regulations 2025. DRS forms part of the Scottish Government's response to the global climate emergency and brings environmental and economic benefits. I think that the member recognises the importance of that, as do 57 other countries that have a deposit return scheme.

The amendments that are proposed follow intervention from the former UK Government with respect to Scotland's DRS. That was originally contrary to the wishes of this Parliament.

Some of the criticisms and concerns that the member has levelled could equally be placed at the door of the UK Government's DRS. That was the policy of his own party. The scheme has now been introduced by the current Labour Government.

However, it is important to hear his questions about the examination of the details of the scheme, which will come from the establishment of the approval that is in the regulations in the order. That will be the responsibility of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

In relation to the point by Fergus Ewing, I refer him to the *Official Report*. He made an accusation that I said something about the company that I do not think is accurate. I said:

"UK DMO Ltd is a private company made up of member organisations from across industry."

I am sure that it will be paying attention to the debate and will have heard what he said. I think that it is, therefore, unfair to accuse me of something that I did not say.

People have concerns about lack of certainty and say that there are too many unknowns, and Conservative members are saying that they cannot support the amendments because of that, I assume, but that is a fundamental misunderstanding of how the scheme should work. DRS is, and always has been, industry-led. Therefore, the scheme administration is responsible for its operational design and delivery. That has long been the preference of industry and Douglas Lumsden's own party at UK level, and it is what the regulations achieve.

Once the DRS scheme administrator is formally designated, it is responsible for implementing DRS on behalf of industry. The scheme administrator must provide the details that the member seeks in its operational plan by March 2026, and it has written to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee to set out how it will do so.

Some of the other issues mentioned are those that the committee will examine. The changes that

are being considered today largely impact on how DRS will interact with other schemes across the UK, not on the fundamental design of the scheme, which was subject to extensive consultation and scrutiny by the Parliament. Indeed, I recall doing so when I was deputy convener of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

We have worked closely with industry on those changes, as well as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Welsh Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland. Regulations also require the scheme administrator to consult on its operational decisions. Once again, it has written to the committee to underline its commitment to do so.

Changes were implemented in 2023, and I am sure that the cabinet secretary will be available to answer any other questions that might not be addressed at this time. Those were necessary changes to the legislative framework for DRS in Scotland, in line with the feedback that we have received from industry, to ensure that the schemes in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland can launch jointly on 1 October 2027.

I urge the chamber to approve the SSI.

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

The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-18006, on approval of an SSI, and motion S6M-18007, on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Environmental Regulation (Enforcement Measures) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Finance and Public Administration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Building Safety Levy (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

## Decision Time

17:22

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

There are 10 questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Shona Robison is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Michael Marra will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-17980.2, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17980, in the name of Craig Hoy, on demanding a better deal for taxpayers in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:23

*Meeting suspended.*

17:24

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Shona Robison is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Michael Marra will fall.

We come to the vote on amendment S6M-17980.2, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17980, in the name of Craig Hoy, on demanding a better deal for taxpayers in Scotland. Members should cast their votes now.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**Against**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

#### Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17980.2, in the name of Shona Robison, is: For 72, Against 42, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The amendment in the name of Michael Marra falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-17980, in the name of Craig Hoy, on demanding a better deal for taxpayers in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Bibby. We will ensure that that is recorded.

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)



Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)  
 (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
 (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)

#### Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-17980, in the name of Craig Hoy, on demanding a better deal for taxpayers in Scotland, as amended, is: For 83, Against 31, Abstentions 1.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament believes that public service reform must be an ongoing process in order to deliver the best use of public funding, and recognises that the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party's arbitrary scheme would lead to a cut in available public funding for vital services like the NHS.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-17981.3, in the name of Kate Forbes, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17981, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on recognising the economic contribution of Scotland's defence sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Please record no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Ruskell. We will ensure that that is recorded.

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 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, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (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) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)

**Against**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the vote on amendment S6M-17981.3, in the name of Kate Forbes, is: For 62, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-17981.1, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17981, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on recognising the economic contribution of

Scotland's defence sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (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) (Alba)  
 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:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17981.1, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 46, Against 69, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-17981.2, in the name of Lorna Slater, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17981, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on recognising the economic contribution of

Scotland's defence sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Please record a no vote.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Macpherson. We will ensure that that is recorded.

#### For

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)

(Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17981.2, in the name

of Lorna Slater, is: For 7, Against 108, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-17981, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on recognising the economic contribution of Scotland's defence sector, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 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, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (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) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)

### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-17981, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on recognising the economic

contribution of Scotland's defence sector, as amended, is: For 62, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the significance of the defence industry to Scotland's economy, in providing secure, well-paid and highly skilled jobs and in driving innovation in the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) sector; and in protecting national security, especially at a time of increased global instability, and notes that defence is a matter reserved to the UK Government under the Scotland Act 1998 and that the Scottish Government's long-standing position is that public money should focus on diversification.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-18004, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland (Designation of Scheme Administrator) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-18005, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and  
 Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
 (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast  
 by Ross Greer]  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote  
 cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)  
 (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)  
 (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-18005, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, is: For 112, Against 2, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** Unless any member objects, I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

As no member objects, the final question is, that motions S6M-18006, on approval of an SSI, and S6M-18007, on designation of a lead committee, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

### *Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Environmental Regulation (Enforcement Measures) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Finance and Public Administration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Building Safety Levy (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## RAAC in Council and Former Council Housing

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-17216, in the name of Liam Kerr, on recognising reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete in council and former council housing. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button, and I call Liam Kerr to open the debate.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament acknowledges the reported presence of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in council and former council housing in Aberdeen's Balnagask, Dundee, Monifieth and throughout Scotland; understands that, in Torry, around 150 of these properties are privately owned; expresses concern that the buy-back offers proposed by councils may value these properties at less than they were bought for; notes reports that the Scottish Government does not believe that it has a liability to compensate or financially assist affected homeowners; regrets what it sees as the attempt by the Scottish Government to divert responsibility, by reportedly trying to pin responsibility on the UK Government for this devolved matter; further regrets reports of the reluctance of the Minister for Housing to meet the Torry RAAC campaign group and that he has not met with other campaign groups, including those in Dundee, and notes calls on MSPs to utilise all available powers to explore solutions for affected homeowners, including initiating an urgent committee inquiry.

17:39

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank colleagues from the Greens, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and, of course, the Scottish Conservatives for signing my motion. It is notable, but regrettable, that there is not a single signature from any member of the Scottish National Party. However, I genuinely thank Audrey Nicoll, the incumbent MSP for the constituency that is becoming Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine; her refreshing unwillingness to toe the party line and her willingness to stand with me for her constituents contrast directly with the approach of Aberdeen's absent member of Parliament and that of the council co-leader, Christian Allard, who, last month, was delivering leaflets for himself 70 miles away in Angus. Only yesterday, Mr Allard was quoted as saying that the Torry home owners will be out by winter; that followed on from him asking one owner whether they had considered bankruptcy as a solution.

That aside, in December 2023, nine landlords confirmed the presence of RAAC in 953 council homes; that does not include former council homes. In that year, Aberdeen City Council warned that around 500 homes in the Balnagask

area in Aberdeen contained RAAC. Of those, 150 were private homes, whose owners were told that the council would buy their houses at the post-RAAC value. I ask members to imagine the situation: either to stay in a house where the roof might fall in, or to accept the lower price and move elsewhere instead, with £40,000 or perhaps £50,000 of outstanding mortgage left over their head. The consequences are disastrous.

At *The Press and Journal's* "Trapped by RAAC" panel event, Torry general practitioner Dr Crofton said that his practice is looking after 60 people with new health problems that the situation has caused. Patients are reporting depression, anxiety, insomnia and stress-related conditions such as chest pains. Some, tragically, have turned to drink, and, in one particularly harrowing testimony, one dad reported that he was considering driving into the harbour so that his family could get the insurance.

Residents report a community torn apart, children separated from friendship groups and elderly and disabled people ripped from their support networks, all for the sake of £5 million, which, according to campaigner Raymond Davidson, could ensure that those home owners got the proper value for their homes and could—literally—move on.

It is appalling and shocking, but not as shocking as the buck passing that we have seen. Campaigners have seen councils and the Scottish Government desperately try to blame the United Kingdom Government. Even today, the new Cabinet Secretary for Housing spent longer pointing at Westminster than proposing solutions, yet RAAC is a devolved matter.

Of course, whenever Westminster tries to intervene directly—for example, on freeports, investment zones or shared prosperity funds—this Government kicks up about undermining devolution. Even were it not so, let us never forget that, in 2020 and 2021, the UK Government gave the Scottish Government more than £97 million to remedy the Grenfell cladding issue. Five years on, the SNP can account for only around £10 million of that having been spent.

Meanwhile, Aberdeen City Council pleads poverty, while ignoring every solution that is put forward by the home owners. I accept that Aberdeen City Council is cash strapped, following years of SNP underfunding. Nonetheless, the council's budget is nearly £1.5 billion a year, and it makes choices as to how it spends that, with residents being only too aware of the choices that it is currently making.

As campaigners have noted, the former SNP councillor Alex Nicoll explained at last week's panel event that, under the Local Government in

Scotland Act 2003, councils can go to the housing minister to ask for funds to be reclassified, but—as he said—the councils had never collectively done that.

Let us be clear: the Scottish Government has not given a single penny to the Torry home owners. As with the council, that is about choices. The block grant has been at record levels since the pandemic and, this year, it is £50 billion. Last week's spending review announced an extra £2.9 billion coming to Holyrood on top of that. It is the Scottish Government that chooses not to spend £5 million to alleviate the problem.

However, it is apparently okay that Scotland has spent £3.5 million on independence planning since 2021 and £5 million in three years on public consultations, and that the around 130 Scottish quangos have had £120 million to spend annually on public relations, external consultants, overseas travel and hospitality.

Even allowing for those poor choices, I have flagged a £20 million pot from the Aberdeen city region deal for housing projects of exactly the sort that we are discussing today, and yet not a single penny has been drawn down since 2016. If that money is not drawn down by 2027, it will disappear. It will be absorbed back into the coffers of the Scottish Government to pay for whatever it chooses, which, this week, would seem to be special advisers and lawyers.

Since the turn of the year, I have sent six letters to the Scottish Government, asking it to release those funds, but the former Minister for Housing refused to budge. Then, in early May, Aberdeen City Council said that it and Aberdeenshire Council have made at least 12 applications for the money but are continually rebuffed because they do not meet the criteria.

What are the criteria? The councils say that the Government, in the past nine years, has not told them. I wrote to the housing minister around six weeks ago, requesting urgent answers. He had not the courtesy to respond to me before he slunk away, so, on hearing of the new cabinet secretary's appointment last Thursday, I immediately forwarded the letter and pleaded for urgent answers. I have yet to receive a response, but perhaps she will tell us all in her closing remarks.

We have heard—and throughout the debate, we will hear—about communities whose hopes and dreams stand on shaky foundations as a result of decisions that were made decades ago and the slopy shoulders of politicians today. Will it take a tragedy, and a Netflix documentary, before the SNP takes responsibility and does the right thing?

The cabinet secretary faces a choice today. At the stroke of a pen, she can instantly make it right

for the people of Torry and the thousands of people across Scotland who are trapped by RAAC, and—quite literally—save people's lives. Alternatively, she can ignore the home owners, follow the instructions of the SNP hierarchy, shift blame and forever reflect on the consequences of inaction. I pray that she chooses wisely.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

17:47

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I thank Liam Kerr for bringing the debate to the chamber. It is an issue that impacts on our constituents and, although we are on different parts of the political spectrum, I think that we are united in our belief that a meaningful and fair solution can, and must, be found, following what has been a traumatising and life-changing experience that is not yet over.

As we have heard, RAAC has been used in buildings in the UK for many decades. However, the risks that are associated with RAAC have become more commonly known only following failures of the material, which have prompted investigations in both housing and public buildings.

In my constituency of Aberdeen South and North Kincardine, more than 500 dwellings that were built using that material in the construction of the monopitch roofs sit within the Balnagask area of Torry. Twenty months ago, Aberdeen City Council assessed around 360 of the 500 homes or council houses as being at high risk from RAAC. The remainder—around 138 privately owned properties—had previously been sold by Aberdeen City Council under right-to-buy legislation, with many being resold since, and they, too, are assessed as high risk.

Torry is a Scottish index of multiple deprivation priority area, part of which sits in the bottom 10 per cent of deprived areas in Scotland. Generations of families have grown up, and live, in Torry, with practical support flowing across generations in both directions. People know each other well and there is a strong sense of belonging and connection. Crucially, the community does not have particularly high expectations or demands in life—people just want to have a good life.

Following the discovery of RAAC, Aberdeen City Council confirmed its intention to demolish the estate on safety grounds, and tenants have since been rehoused across the city. Home owners now face a choice of compulsory purchase or agreeing a sale at a reduced price that reflects the impact of RAAC on valuations. That has significant financial implications for home owners, many of whom stand to lose many tens of thousands of pounds through no fault of their own.



Over the past year or so, I have engaged with well over 100 constituents, who are bewildered and frightened and feel powerless. I commend council officers and many other professionals who have worked tirelessly to support home owners, including Dr Adrian Crofton and his team at the Torry medical practice, and Eleanor Sheppard, executive director of families and communities in Aberdeen City Council, whom I thank for her engagement and solution-focused approach.

Although the issue that we are discussing is nothing short of a major incident, cost has become a central and challenging theme. On that, I have engaged with all tiers of government and numerous stakeholders to look under the bonnet of the issue to see how we can address the plight of home owners in such a way that they do not lose out. That is simply the right thing to do. It has been a frustrating process, and I deeply regret that we are not there yet.

I also commend the former Minister for Housing, Paul McLennan, for his engagement with me and community members on the situation that faces private owners. I am also grateful for his feedback on his latest engagement with Aberdeen City Council, in which he set out a range of actions that reflect the Government's commitment to supporting Aberdeen City Council to resolve the situation.

To conclude, I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Housing to her new role, which reflects the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling that priority area, and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue with her in early course.

I strongly urge strong leadership—strong local leadership—to effect a timely and collaborative response that is centred on people, not cost, and fairness for everybody who has been impacted.

17:51

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate my colleague Liam Kerr on achieving cross-party support on the topic of the debate. I also congratulate him for his work on it—he is not just standing up for his constituents but raising RAAC as an important issue for the Scottish Parliament to consider.

As this is my first opportunity to do so, I welcome Màiri McAllan back to Parliament following her maternity leave, and congratulate her on her new post as Cabinet Secretary for Housing. I look forward to working with her over the next few months.

I am relieved that the penny has finally dropped for the Scottish Government. I have long argued that housing should be a stand-alone portfolio, and

should sit in the Cabinet. That is the only way that we can ensure that the Scottish Government can be held fully to account on progress on tackling the deepening housing emergency. I am certain that one of the many issues that the cabinet secretary will be well aware of is RAAC—specifically, how the Government will remediate properties that are affected by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete.

I will not ask the cabinet secretary how many properties are affected by RAAC, because we all know the answer that I would get. I tried to obtain that figure from the previous housing minister, but was unsuccessful, because the Scottish Government has not got a clue. We know from data that has been collected by the Scottish Housing Regulator that around 2,500 social housing units have been identified as containing RAAC. However, although 145 social landlords have confirmed that no RAAC is in their properties, some are still investigating. Of course, those figures do not include home owners, many of whom are conducting their own investigations to find out what position they are in.

Despite knowing for years that RAAC could present a serious public health risk, the Scottish Government has failed to address the issue head on. RAAC hotlines have been set up to try to identify the exact number of people who live in homes that are riddled with RAAC, but, frankly, it is embarrassing that we are no further forward than we were when the issue was raised in 2019, after the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service identified the presence of RAAC in fire stations. That is why my colleague Liam Kerr's members' business debate this afternoon is important.

On 22 April, at a meeting of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, the former housing minister promised that he would meet local residents in Aberdeen in May. That is on the official record, and I am pleased that that meeting took place. That could have been an opportunity to alleviate the concerns of local residents and for the Scottish Government to commit to a plan to assist home owners to remediate their homes. However, again, we are no further forward.

At the same time, cash-strapped councils face mounting repair bills to fix RAAC in public buildings and thousands of Scots have been forced out of their homes while the value of their properties plummets. As was the case with the 150 privately owned affected properties in Torry, the buy-back offers that are proposed by councils are likely to be significantly less than the homes were bought for. That is a grave injustice that home owners, through no fault of their own, are suffering because of Scottish Government inaction.

Lastly, I raise the issue of the disparity in the approaches that are outlined by local government. Some councils have opted for demolition, while others try to remediate. As there has been no leadership and no direction from central Government, that has undoubtedly led to inconsistency across the board, which means that RAAC remediation is a postcode lottery.

We have a new opportunity, however, as we now have a Cabinet Secretary for Housing who will sit at the top tier of Government. She has an opportunity to do three things. First, she can meet with the campaign groups in order to fully understand their concerns and the issues that they have continuously raised and campaigned on. Secondly, she can create a plan to work with local authorities to ensure that remediation options are consistent and that they prevent upheaval for home owners specifically. Thirdly, she can outline—finally—whether the Scottish Government will assist with the remediation of privately owned homes. That is the very least that the Government can do in order to provide the reassurance and clarity that many people across Scotland desperately need, given that the properties that they own are affected by RAAC.

17:56

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I start with an apology, Deputy Presiding Officer, to you, Liam Kerr and other members in the chamber for missing the opening sentences of what was a powerful contribution—I apologise to all.

I echo Meghan Gallacher's welcome to the cabinet secretary in returning to the Parliament and to the inclusion of the housing portfolio in a Cabinet post, which will, at last, bring the subject directly to the Cabinet table.

This is a fascinating and important debate that has been brought to the chamber as a result of a member's motion that talks about individuals—individuals who own houses in which they live and in which they want their families to grow up and to feel safe. As has already been adequately shown, the last thing that those people feel is safe. The consequences of that are potentially fatal, although let us hope not. Nevertheless, those families will not be able to grow and mature in a safe environment.

I will return to the housing element, but first I will spend a short time talking about two different situations involving RAAC that have arisen in the south of Scotland, close to Lothian, in the council area of East Lothian. One case concerns a high school and the other involves a theatre. The theatre is operated through trusts and charities by East Lothian Council to further the cultural importance of East Lothian. The presence of

RAAC was identified in that building and it has been rendered unusable—indeed, it has been rendered unsafe. Much discussion is going on about whether a new theatre can be built or whether other things can be done towards that aim.

The other case involves Preston Lodge high school in Prestonpans, in East Lothian, which falls very much in my South Scotland region. RAAC was identified there, but it was repaired within months—at great expense—because the school was a private finance initiative school. The responsibility fell on the funders of the school to ensure that education could continue, and financial contributions allowed children who were moved away to continue to be taught in other community buildings. There was a massive incentive to get the school open again, because there was a commitment to providing facilities for education.

I draw an analogy between those two cases and now turn to housing, because where there is a will, there is a way. I look back to the Government's "Housing to 2040" strategy, which was published on 15 March 2021. In that strategy, the Government said:

"Since 1999, housing policy has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament."

It went on to say, in bold lettering, that

"This has allowed a new approach to develop in Scotland, one that recognises the central role that housing plays in determining quality of life."

Finally, it said:

"We have taken a different course to other UK nations on affordable housing supply, Right to Buy, affordability, homelessness, child poverty, security of tenure and energy efficiency."

In Liam Kerr's opening speech and in other speeches on how RAAC is affecting home owners, the Government is being put to the test on its own words. I echo Meghan Gallacher's request: a good start would be to meet all the campaign groups. The second task is to solve the problem for the people of Scotland. That responsibility falls on the Scottish Government.

18:00

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I am grateful to Liam Kerr for securing the debate, and I echo other members' comments in welcoming the cabinet secretary to her new role.

At the heart of the debate are peoples' homes. For anyone, whether they are a renter or a home owner, the thought that the safety of their home might be compromised—that it might not be structurally sound—and that they might face not

only financial loss but immense upheaval must be one of the most unsettling feelings to experience. Our homes are our foundation. They are the place where we should feel safe and secure. They are the place that gives us the starting point for our days and that offers rest and sanctuary.

The Scottish Greens believe that every person deserves a safe, affordable and secure home. Housing is not a commodity but a social necessity. Alongside that principle, it is important to consider the value of public accountability. Public bodies must act transparently. They must consult residents and ensure just compensation or rehousing, especially for those who are hit hardest by the structural failures of RAAC. I will spend a bit of time considering that point.

Across the North East Scotland region, there remains considerable uncertainty about the scale of RAAC. In Dundee, more than 900 properties had been reported as being affected, but that figure was corrected to 887—526 social homes and 361 private homes. In Aberdeen, 504 homes—366 council properties and 138 private dwellings—are affected. At least 26 affected homes have been identified in Monifieth. However, residents, tenants and home owners are concerned that those numbers do not represent the full scale of the issue.

There are multiple continuing investigations, but—this is crucial—the lack of systematic testing by local authorities places private and social housing on not only an unequal but an uncertain footing. We also note that different brand names of RAAC are being treated differently without any clear explanation being given. There are also challenges because more and more documents are emerging that show that the risks of RAAC have been known for a considerable time—at least 40 years. Despite that, some public bodies seem unwilling to admit that systematic surveys or interventions are necessary and that they might even have some responsibility for that.

There are also significant inequalities across Scotland in how communities are being treated. Some councils are opting for demolition and rebuilding, some are offering limited financial support for remediation and some are not engaging with residents at all. However, the emotional toll on individuals, families and communities is common across all areas. Residents are worried and anxious. They fear homelessness or bankruptcy. Their mental health is suffering, as Liam Kerr outlined. Their communities are being destabilised. We must not underestimate the negative impacts that that is having on individuals, families and their communities.

We need co-ordinated action and shared working. I would like to see a national audit that

covers private and social properties, with public reporting supported by councils and both of our Governments. We must ensure that the protection of residents is our priority in the matter.

I was glad to have arranged a meeting between the then housing minister, Paul McLennan, and constituents in Dundee who are concerned about RAAC. That meeting took place just last week, following the meeting that Paul McLennan had attended in Torry. Several commitments were made at those meetings, and I would welcome comments from the cabinet secretary and early engagement with her on how those issues will be taken forward.

RAAC has been a known risk for more than 40 years, but, today, families in Dundee, Aberdeen, Angus and beyond face eviction, financial ruin and emotional distress. It is a national crisis that transcends council borders.

We need people-centred and co-ordinated solutions, including full transparency, proper compensation, safe and free housing, retrofit when possible and rebuilding to modern standards, funded together by local government and the Scottish and UK Governments, because nobody should be left in limbo for a place that they call home.

18:05

**The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan):** I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to hear members' reflections on the debate, and I am grateful to Liam Kerr for securing it.

I am very pleased to make my first contribution in the chamber since returning from maternity leave last week. I am also pleased that this is my first contribution as housing secretary, because we are discussing an important issue.

This has been noted, but I want to put on the record that my being appointed to this role at this time is about the Government stressing the importance that we place on housing. We are identifying the central importance of housing and how much it can contribute to our principal aims of reducing poverty, growing our economy and achieving net zero.

Having said that, and bearing in mind the importance of having a warm, safe and affordable home on a personal level, I offer my sincere sympathies to anyone whose home has been adversely affected by RAAC. I understand how worrying it can be. I put myself entirely in their shoes, and I completely understand why support is being sought and why their local members of Parliament are advocating for them.

I say very straightforwardly that, although the issues should be worked through principally between home owners, their council and Governments, I want to give what support we can.

Let me close off from the outset the issue of meeting residents. Of course I will meet residents—I would be glad to. I know some of the Torry community already—we spent an afternoon together on a matter in my previous portfolio. The only point that I make is that they recently met my colleague the former housing minister, alongside Liam Kerr and Audrey Nicoll, as was mentioned. I say that so that I can—

**Liam Kerr:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Màiri McAllan:** I will take the intervention in a second. I want to reassure them that they do not need to worry that there will be any lack of continuity between their meeting the former minister and their meeting me. I will take forward the outcomes of that meeting, which also goes for the meeting in respect of Dundee.

**Liam Kerr:** I will cut to the chase. I am sure that residents would be grateful for a meeting, but they would be even more grateful if you would just release the £20 million, or even £5 million of it, that was promised to Aberdeen in order to get the issue sorted right now.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Always speak through the chair.

**Màiri McAllan:** I will come to some of the solutions that are on the table in a second, but Liam Kerr included the point about a meeting in his motion, so I want to do him and residents the courtesy of addressing it. I know that solutions are the most important thing.

Before I come on to talk about solutions, I will pick up on a couple of points that are important to put on the record. First, Meghan Gallacher talked of there having been no progress. With the greatest of respect, she is incorrect. I refer her to my colleague Ivan McKee's statement on 29 May, in which he set out the progress that has been made in identifying and rectifying RAAC in the public sector.

**Meghan Gallacher:** If memory serves me well, my point was about having more talking shops, more ministerial engagements and so on. That is not progress. What people need is confirmation from the cabinet secretary today that, in the case of Torry residents, the money will be released, and they need to know whether the Government will commit to any solutions in relation to funding or otherwise that residents can rely on in order to remediate their homes.

**Màiri McAllan:** I appreciate Meghan Gallacher's point. As I have said, I will come on to talk about

solutions very soon, but it is important not to mislead the public. Progress has been made. Comprehensive surveys have been undertaken across the public sector, and I am addressing matters on housing today.

The other point to stress is that we must be careful in how we talk about RAAC, which, when manufactured, designed, installed and maintained properly, need not be dangerous and can function in the long term. I urge anyone commenting on RAAC to be mindful of how they frame that. Anyone who suspects that they have RAAC should seek professional help to have a thorough investigation.

I turn to the point that, I agree, is most important at the moment.

**Maggie Chapman:** The cabinet secretary says that residents should seek help and get a survey, but the cost of that is a challenge in the first place. There are also people who live in blocks and who do not themselves have RAAC while those in a neighbouring property do. That has a direct impact on the value and safety of their property, but they cannot effect any remediation because their property is not directly affected, even though they are, to all intents and purposes, in a RAAC-affected building.

**Màiri McAllan:** That point underlines the importance of identifying and remediating RAAC wherever it exists, particularly in mixed-tenure properties.

I turn to some of the solutions on the table for properties in Aberdeen. Aberdeen City Council has engaged with us and with home owners on voluntary sales based on market value, although I understand that that is a concern because the presence of RAAC has diminished the market value of those properties. The council has offered disturbance payments and relocation support, and it has met reasonable legal costs incurred in connection with all of that. I know that the option of roof replacement is also being considered as an alternative to the initial agreed position of demolition and that discussions on that matter between home owners and the council are on-going.

On the Government's part, my officials have received, and are considering, Aberdeen City Council's request for the housing infrastructure fund, which has been mentioned, to be repurposed to allow the local authority to support efforts with RAAC. I am currently taking advice on that proposal, and ministers will make a decision on it in due course. I also wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister. RAAC is unquestionably—

**Liam Kerr:** Will the cabinet secretary accept an intervention?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am very short of time. Do I have any time in hand?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back.

**Màiri McAllan:** Thank you. I will take the intervention.

**Liam Kerr:** Residents will, of course, ask exactly the question that I am about to ask. We do not have a lot of time, so how soon will that decision be made?

**Màiri McAllan:** I appreciate that and will endeavour to make the decision as soon as possible. Liam Kerr will understand that I must consider the terms of that decision very carefully.

As I mentioned, I have also written to the Deputy Prime Minister, who is the housing secretary for England. The properties were sold under the right to buy, which long pre-dates the devolution era. That is not buck passing—it is an instance of responsible Governments and individuals bringing together a coalition of responsible and responsive individuals.

I am aware of the calls for a public inquiry and for the establishment of a RAAC register. I think that the latter is impractical, because such a register would have to be continually updated as remediation took place. More importantly, it could have a negative impact on householders, not least those living in the mixed-tenure buildings that were mentioned. Public inquiries take significant time and have significant costs, and the focus, at least right now, must be on finding solutions and getting people settled.

Having people settled and settling the matter is what I want to achieve. North Lanarkshire Council has worked with affected home owners, which demonstrates that, although the issue is undoubtedly complex, we can find a path through it by working together.

My colleague Audrey Nicoll said that a meaningful and fair solution must be found. I want to find that, and I commit the Government to assisting in that.

*Meeting closed at 18:14.*



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