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Wednesday 10 December 2025

CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER RESPONSIBILITIES, ECONOMY AND GAELIC	1
Visitor Levy	1
Living Wage Places	2
Oil and Gas Jobs (North-East)	3
“A Trading Nation”	4
Manufacturing (Renewable Energy)	6
Gaelic School Provision	7
OBR Economic Forecasts	8
Closure of Fife Ethylene Plant	9
FINANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	11
Local Government Services (Community-led Initiatives)	11
Planning Applications (Job Creation)	13
Aberdeen City Council (Support)	14
Energy Profits Levy (North East Scotland)	15
High Street Retailers in South Scotland (Budget)	16
Family Protection Insurance Plan	17
RAAC (Support for Local Authorities)	18
Tax Thresholds (Budget)	19
SOCIAL SECURITY SPENDING	21
<i>Motion moved—[Alexander Stewart].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Shirley-Anne Somerville].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Claire Baker].</i>	
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	21
The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville)	24
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	26
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)	28
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	30
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	31
Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	33
Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con)	34
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)	36
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)	38
Maggie Chapman	40
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab)	41
Shirley-Anne Somerville	43
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con)	46
ROAD NETWORK (CONNECTIVITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH)	49
<i>Motion moved—[Sue Webber].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Fiona Hyslop].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Daniel Johnson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mark Ruskell].</i>	
Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)	49
The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop)	52
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)	55
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	56
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD)	59
Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	60
Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	62
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)	63
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)	66
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	67
Mark Ruskell	69
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	71

Fiona Hyslop	72
Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con)	75
POINT OF ORDER	78
URGENT QUESTION	79
Professor Alexis Jay (Correspondence)	79
BUSINESS MOTIONS	85
<i>Motions moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Douglas Lumsden].</i>	
Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con)	87
The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey)	89
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	96
<i>Motions moved—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	96
The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie)	98
DECISION TIME	101
FIFA WORLD CUP 2026	117
<i>Motion debated—[Keith Brown].</i>	
Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)	117
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	121
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)	123
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	125
Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP)	126
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab)	128
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	128
Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)	130
The Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy and Sport (Maree Todd)	132

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 10 December 2025

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

Portfolio Question Time

Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is Deputy First Minister responsibilities, economy and Gaelic. I advise members that there is a lot of interest in asking supplementary questions. I will try to get in as many as possible, but that will require brief questions and answers.

Visitor Levy

1. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its recent decision to allow a flat-rate approach to the visitor levy, what discussions the economy secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding whether to also introduce lower non-domestic rates for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. (S6O-05259)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): The Scottish Government has regular engagement with the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through the non-domestic rates consultative group, which is chaired by the Minister for Public Finance, and other forums such as the Scottish hospitality round table. We regularly discuss matters of importance, including budget priorities and the views of stakeholders, in the run-up to the Scottish budget. As is normal, decisions on non-domestic rates policy for next year will be set out in the budget on 13 January 2026.

Liz Smith: The Deputy First Minister knows that it was the Scottish Conservatives who warned that a flat-rate levy would be much fairer and easier for businesses to administer, which is why we lodged amendments to make that happen. Now that ministers have finally accepted that position, will the Deputy First Minister commit to continuing to listen to the constructive pro-growth solutions that the Scottish Conservatives set out, starting with action on business rates, to restore confidence in Scotland's retail, hospitality and leisure sectors?

Kate Forbes: It is always nice, if a little bit rare, to hear constructive pro-growth policies from the

Conservatives—*[Interruption]*—although I always appreciate Liz Smith's contributions in that regard. We just need to get the rest of her colleagues into the same space.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): The Scottish Government's rates relief policies are the most generous anywhere in the United Kingdom, and the visitor levy is designed to make popular tourist destinations more competitive, with enhanced visitor services and facilities. Will the cabinet secretary say more about how the Scottish Government's measures of support will continue strengthening Scotland's regional visitor economy?

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): They are not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We do not need any sedentary interventions.

Kate Forbes: Colin Beattie is absolutely right to talk about the Scottish Government's rates relief being some of the most generous anywhere in the UK. That is particularly important when it comes to our high streets, where businesses benefit from the small business bonus scheme in particular. The visitor levy is designed to help to reinvest levies that are raised in popular tourist destinations. The choice of whether to introduce a levy is a matter for local authorities.

Living Wage Places

2. Bob Doris: To ask the Scottish Government how it supports Scotland's living wage places to encourage the uptake of the real living wage amongst employers. (S6O-05260)

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government has a funding partnership with Living Wage Scotland going back to 2015 that supports the real living wage accreditation scheme. That has led to the establishment of five living wage places, an increase in the number of accredited employers from 14 in 2014 to more than 4,000 in 2025, and at least 72,000 workers in Scotland receiving a pay rise as a direct result of their employers' decision to accredit. The partnership has made Scotland the best performing of the four United Kingdom nations, with the highest proportion of workers aged 18 and over being paid at least the real living wage, at 88.7 per cent against the UK average of 85.4 per cent.

Bob Doris: I congratulate the Glasgow city region, where 200 new employers have been accredited as paying the real living wage in the year to November 2025, benefiting almost 2,000 additional employees. The city region now has 1,300 accredited employers and it has ambitions to reach 2,000 in the next three years. How can

the Scottish Government support that ambition, whether by working with sectors that find paying the real living wage more challenging, such as hospitality, or by helping to remove barriers such as the UK Government's employer national insurance contribution increases?

Richard Lochhead: I congratulate Glasgow on being a real living wage place and on the progress that the member outlined. He referred to hospitality, and fair work continues to be at the heart of our national tourism strategy. The Fair Work Convention has done a lot of work on fair work in the hospitality sector, and we continue to support and enable the adoption of fair work practices in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

We are taking a lot of other measures. I mentioned our funding partnership with Living Wage Scotland, which includes a low-pay sector strategy that involves targeted engagement with employers in sectors such as hospitality, social care, tourism and retail. A lot of work is taking place on that.

Oil and Gas Jobs (North-East)

3. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the economy secretary has had with ministerial colleagues on how its internal modelling of oil and gas jobs in the north-east compares with the latest industry estimates. (S6O-05261)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): We monitor and consider a range of evidence in relation to the energy sector. As part of that approach, we commissioned and published independent analysis of Scotland's energy system and just transition. That analysis considers the economic impact of Scotland's oil and gas industry, including in terms of employment, during the transition to net zero.

Douglas Lumsden: I thank the Deputy First Minister for that answer, but it is not good, because the North Sea industry has been trapped in a vicious circle of Scottish National Party Governments that demonise oil and gas, egged on by student politicians and Green extremists, who delight in every announcement of hundreds of jobs being lost in the north-east. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that we should do everything that we can to reverse the worrying downward trend in oil and gas jobs, which will damage our energy transition in the long term?

Kate Forbes: Every employer that is facing the prospect of redundancies in the oil and gas industry right now cites the energy profits levy and the damaging effect that it has. If the Conservatives had not extended the levy, it would have expired at the end of this year, so perhaps

the Conservatives need to ask why they extended it.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): On that note, does the cabinet secretary share my concern that industry modelling has consistently shown that the biggest threat to oil and gas jobs remains the Tories' energy profits levy, which is now continued by Labour?

Kate Forbes: Absolutely—I could not agree more. The biggest threat—those are not my words, but the words of multiple employers—to jobs in the energy sector in the north-east is the energy profits levy. That was introduced by the Conservatives and extended by the Conservatives, and it has now been extended by Labour. We all hoped that, at the recent budget, Labour would suspend and replace the levy, but the UK Government obviously does not appreciate the level of threat that is facing our energy industry right now.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Modelling by Uplift shows how new oil and gas licensing does not and cannot lead to new jobs in the north-east because, over the past decade, hundreds of new licences were awarded, but jobs in the sector still halved. What is the Scottish Government doing to support Labour-founded Great British Energy to become the UK's energy champion, to accelerate the deployment of clean energy technologies that benefit us all and to redress deindustrialisation in the north-east region?

Kate Forbes: Let me be clear that we are working collaboratively with GB Energy and we appreciate the work that it is doing, particularly in collaboration with, for example, the Scottish National Investment Bank. The primary issue, however, is that jobs are being lost in the north-east—largely because of the energy profits levy—at a faster rate than new ones are being created through renewables and particularly offshore wind. Some clear policy levers could be deployed to shift that balance. We encourage the UK Government to move faster when it comes to things such as auction rounds and grid connectivity to accelerate the roll-out of offshore wind. At the same time, the UK Government should, as a matter of urgency, replace the energy profits levy, which the UK Government itself accepts is unjust and unfair.

“A Trading Nation”

4. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the impact of its export growth strategy, “A Trading Nation”, including what metrics it has used to assess this. (S6O-05262)

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government

has provided regular updates on the delivery of “A Trading Nation”, our policy on the issue, since it was published back in 2019. We published a full progress report in 2022 and we have also published an independent evaluation of the delivery and impact of “A Trading Nation”, with a further update due next year.

In 2024-25, Scottish Enterprise secured a record forecast of £2.46 billion in future export sales, which was an increase of more than 10 per cent from the previous year. However, as the member might be aware, Scotland’s international exports remain just below 21 per cent of gross domestic product against our 2029 target of 25 per cent, which reflects the scale of the challenge that is being experienced in trade as a result of global uncertainty and the impacts of Brexit.

Tess White: Recently released data shows that United Kingdom exports have grown by 4.6 per cent while Scotland’s have fallen by 7 per cent. Since 2018, Scotland’s international exports have fallen by 4 per cent in real terms, and instead of rising to 25 per cent—the target that is set out in “A Trading Nation”—they now sit at just 20 per cent. In light of those outcomes, will the minister admit that the Scottish National Party Government is failing on trade and failing businesses that export?

Richard Lochhead: I am astonished by the points that Tess White raised in her question. It is clear that Scottish exports to Europe were very important to the overall picture of Scottish exports. Therefore, Brexit, which was introduced by her party, has really damaged Scotland’s export efforts. We have a lot of work to do to recover from that. It would help the Parliament if she at least recognised that Brexit is the key factor behind the decline in exports from Scotland to Europe in the statistics that she mentioned.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The minister is doing an admirable job in defending the Government’s record, but the target is 25 per cent and exports fell from 22 per cent to 20 per cent last year. Worse than that, the figures show that exports to the rest of the UK have fallen by 10 per cent. What is the Government doing to help exporters to export to our biggest and most proximate market—the rest of the UK?

Richard Lochhead: The member is quite right that the UK is a very important market to Scotland. We have more than £90 billion in exports, much of which goes to the rest of the UK, and there are a lot of international exports as well. We now have a six-point export plan to address some of the challenges.

Scotland has been disproportionately hit—I repeat the word “disproportionately”—by Brexit

compared with other parts of the UK, which is why we face the challenges that we currently do.

Manufacturing (Renewable Energy)

5. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support manufacturing, including in the renewable energy sector. (S6O-05263)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): The Scottish Government is committed to a thriving manufacturing sector, as underlined by our £75 million investment in the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland. Manufacturing accounts for 178,000 jobs and more than half Scotland’s international exports. In 2023, the sector contributed £18.1 billion in gross value added to Scotland’s economy.

Michael Matheson: The Deputy First Minister will recognise that securing manufacturing capacity in the renewable energy sector in Scotland is critical to the delivery of a just transition. She will also be aware that Ming Yang has proposed a £1.5 billion investment in a manufacturing facility at Ardersier. She will recognise that the delay in the United Kingdom Government making a decision on the matter is now causing significant uncertainty in the renewable energy sector.

What engagement has the Deputy First Minister had with the UK Government on the issue? Will she ensure that she presses the UK Government for an early decision on the matter, given the economic benefits that that investment would bring not only to the Highlands but to Scotland as a whole?

Kate Forbes: Jobs in the manufacturing sector are among the biggest prizes for our economy in the just transition. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build, create and manufacture products that will be essential for the just transition and the renewables industry. The export of such products will ensure that Scotland is at the heart of the global transition to net zero.

We totally understand the importance of national security, but the time that it is taking for the decision to be made is damaging for the supply chain and developers, because the uncertainty is essentially stalling momentum, which means that others are not making the timely decisions that are required to boost our economy.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The Deputy First Minister has talked about support for manufacturing, but communities across Forth Valley are still waiting for basic transparency about the future of the Ineos Olefins and Polymers plant at Grangemouth. I have written to the Deputy First Minister a couple of times to seek some detailed

answers about the Government's contingency planning for the site, but I have not yet seen any detail.

Given the scale of the risk to hundreds of highly skilled jobs and to Scotland's wider industrial base, will the Deputy First Minister set out what contingency planning is in place for the O and P plant, which Scottish Government directorates are leading the work and when the Parliament will finally be given a transparent plan, rather than reassurances that, sadly, have too often not matched reality in the past?

Kate Forbes: It varies, but I engage with the O and P plant, on average, about once a month, which reflects the site's importance. I completely agree with Stephen Kerr's emphasis on the importance of the site.

There are on-going conversations with the United Kingdom Government on the bulk of any support that would be required for the plant, but the Scottish Government has also explored options for support.

Ultimately—and I guess that this will create some frustration—a lot of the information is very commercially sensitive, as Stephen Kerr will appreciate. However, I assure him that engagement is taking place, on average, once a month, and that the issue forms part of the agenda for my direct engagement with UK Government ministers, such is the importance of the plant.

Gaelic School Provision

6. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of parents now being able to request Gaelic school provision in their areas, what financial and resource support it is providing to local authorities to ensure that such requests can be considered and implemented. (S6O-05264)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): A number of sources of financial support are in place to respond to requests for Gaelic school provision. That can include support from the learning estate investment programme, the local authority's capital programme and the Scottish Government's Gaelic schools capital fund. We also provide resource funding to help with the delivery of Gaelic-medium education. Further support for GME in schools comes from a range of bodies, including Education Scotland and Stòrlann.

Rhoda Grant: The cabinet secretary will be aware that the retention and development of the Gaelic language hinge on tackling depopulation in the Gaelic heartlands. What support is the Scottish Government providing to employers and further education institutions to enable them to target

population retention? What specific measures are being taken to expand the pipeline of qualified teachers in Gaelic-medium education in order to tackle staffing shortages?

Kate Forbes: Rhoda Grant has asked a number of questions, so I might not do justice to them all in my answer.

First, the need to provide support for the Gaelic heartlands is precisely why the establishment of areas of linguistic significance is critical. I am keen to move at pace in encouraging local authorities to engage with communities before presenting proposals for the designation of areas as areas of linguistic significance, because that will unlock a number of other support provisions.

Secondly, on support for employers, we recently renamed the Gaelic group that I help to chair. We had our first meeting under the new name of Tog this week, and there are—for the first time, I think—representatives from the private sector on that group. That indicates how important it is that the private sector is also supported. Through that group, we are considering how to support the creation of new jobs.

Given that the light on my microphone is flashing, I will write to Rhoda Grant on the issue of qualified teachers, which is a matter of priority.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Pupils are being provided with an excellent Gaelic-medium education in my constituency—which is outwith the Gaelic heartlands—in Condorrat primary school and Greenfaulds high school, but there is a desire among the community for a dedicated GME campus for those aged three to 18. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, even where there is already provision, local authorities should be open to considering new requests to further enhance such education, particularly in areas outwith the Gàidhealtachd?

Kate Forbes: I commend the work that goes on at Condorrat primary school and Greenfaulds high school, and I share Jamie Hepburn's aspiration for enhancing Gaelic-medium education. He is absolutely right to reflect that GME campuses for those aged three to 18 are transformational, because all the data and evidence indicate that, when a child is educated in an entirely Gaelic-medium area from the age of three to 18, the outcomes are stronger.

OBR Economic Forecasts

7. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, regarding any implications for its work to grow Scotland's economy, whether it will provide an update on its engagement with the United Kingdom Government regarding the Office for Budget Responsibility's recent economic forecasts. (S6O-05265)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Ahead of the UK budget, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to set out the Scottish Government's priorities, but, once again, Scotland did not receive what we had highlighted—I have already talked about changes to the energy profits levy.

The Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast, which was published alongside the budget, downgraded the outlook for the UK economy, based on weaker productivity growth. Since 2007, gross domestic product per person in Scotland has grown by 10.2 per cent, compared with 6.8 per cent in the UK, while productivity has also grown at a higher average rate.

Gordon MacDonald: The OBR has updated its growth forecasts for the next five years. It now forecasts average GDP growth to be slower than was projected in March 2025. It also downgraded its forecast for the UK for 2026, 2027 and 2028. In the light of those forecasts, what policies has the Scottish Government implemented to help to grow Scotland's economy?

Kate Forbes: Economic growth is a priority for the Scottish Government. We will continue to support businesses through transformative initiatives such as the Scottish National Investment Bank and Techscaler, and through investment of up to £500 million in offshore wind. Scotland is a top destination outside London for foreign direct investment, and Scotland's green freeports are attracting early-stage investment, such as Sumitomo's £350 million commitment at Nigg and Haventus's £300 million commitment at Ardersier. Our strengths are recognised by global credit rating agencies, which gave the Scottish Government a rating that is the same as the UK's and higher than that of major European and global economies.

Closure of Fife Ethylene Plant

8. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the economy secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding support for the workforce and local economy of Mossmorran, in light of ExxonMobil's announcement that the Fife ethylene plant will be closed. (S6O-05266)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): We are engaging with them extensively, and I very much appreciated Willie Rennie's attendance at the summit that I hosted a few weeks ago. Since the announced closure, the First Minister and I have been in regular discussion on the topic. I have also been engaging with the Minister for Public Finance and the Cabinet

Secretary for Climate Action and Energy to ensure that the Government remains focused on securing the best possible outcome for the site.

Willie Rennie: I appreciated the Deputy First Minister's leadership at that summit.

Apart from the initial furore, there has been a lot of silence since the announcement, despite the fact that it will have a big impact on the local economy—I am sure that that is what the Deputy First Minister found when she visited the plant. Will she tell us of more tangible progress that is being made, such as who has been interested in coming to the site, how many jobs could be secured from that and how quickly it could happen?

Kate Forbes: I would be very happy to give Willie Rennie an update today, but—and perhaps this would be more useful—I want to continue to keep him updated as the process develops. As part of Scottish Enterprise's early engagement, it has been working very constructively with ExxonMobil since the announcement was made.

We are looking at two potential opportunities. The first involves projects that were identified through project willow or the Grangemouth task force. Some of those projects might be a better fit for Mossmorran, and some of the companies are indicating that Mossmorran might be of more interest to them. Those are slightly more medium-term opportunities.

Secondly, and in the short term, Scottish Enterprise is looking at how to mitigate the impact on the local community by identifying ways to increase the number of jobs locally through supporting other employers in the community.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is time for a couple of supplementary questions, but they will need to be brief.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the sky-high cost of energy is crippling Scotland's industries and that, given the immediate implications for the workers at Mossmorran and while the levers to make a difference and save jobs remain reserved to Westminster, it is essential that the Labour Government acts now to ensure a just transition and to support the energy sector?

Kate Forbes: Every household in Scotland is aware of how challenging energy prices are and of the fact that they have continued to increase since Labour took office. That is even more challenging for some energy-intensive businesses, which have seen no support and are not subject to a cap on the increase in energy prices. It is all the more difficult to operate in a globally competitive environment when other competitors, particularly across Europe, are seeing lower energy prices.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I listened intently to the Deputy First Minister's response to Willie Rennie, and in particular to what she said about the project willow projects—which, if it involves taking potential jobs away from Grangemouth to give them to Mossmorran, sounds like robbing Peter to pay Paul. However, there is a wider concern, which is that Grangemouth and Mossmorran closing represents the loss of our industrial base. Where is the Scottish Government's industrial strategy for the future?

Kate Forbes: Murdo Fraser said that he was listening intently, but perhaps he was not listening enough. The point that I made was that some of the businesses that have been exploring the prospect of locating in Grangemouth are recognising that Mossmorran may be better suited to their needs. It is not a question of taking from Grangemouth to support Mossmorran; it is one of retaining the jobs in Scotland. Where one site may not be a perfect fit, there may be more appropriate sites, such as at Mossmorran.

We are keen to use the Grangemouth process to support industrial assets generally. We have our green industrial strategy and, at a point such as this, it is a matter of actively delivering for the sites and retaining the jobs as far as we can.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the Deputy First Minister responsibilities, economy and Gaelic portfolio.

Finance and Local Government

Local Government Services (Community-led Initiatives)

1. **Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the contribution that community-led initiatives can make to supporting local government services and outcomes, and reducing demand through early intervention and prevention. (S6O-05267)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): Our recently published public service reform strategy recognises the critical importance of community empowerment to the design and delivery of local services. Through the democracy matters process, we have gained valuable insight into the contribution that community-based organisations and individual citizens are already making to improving outcomes in local areas, as well as their desire for greater influence and control over decisions that affect them.

Keith Brown: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the innovative transformation work that is under way in Clackmannanshire, supported by £1

million of investment from the Scottish Government, which puts community voice at the centre of designing local solutions. By contrast, does she agree that the United Kingdom Government's top-down pride in place programme, which provides no funding for Clackmannanshire, undermines both devolution and genuine community-led initiatives such as those in my constituency? Is she concerned that, although Labour members of the Welsh Parliament have spoken out against that devolution grab by the Labour Government in Westminster, there has not been a squeak from the Labour Party here in Holyrood?

Shona Robison: I agree with that. Although we welcome all investment to support Scotland's communities, we are strongly opposed to the use of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020—as the Labour Party here used to be—to fund activity in devolved areas in Scotland. The UK Government's local growth funding, including the pride in place programme, has completely bypassed democratic scrutiny and accountability and has created stakeholder confusion, undermining the governance structures and work of local communities. That is a view that is shared by Labour members of the Senedd in Wales.

We have a strong track record of delivering regeneration with communities, and I hope that the UK Government honours our previous ministerial agreement to work together to maximise the impact of those funds for Scotland's people and places.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask for supplementary questions to be brief.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Audit Scotland has warned that councils are under severe financial pressure this year, with community facilities and local services already being cut back. Community groups tell us that they simply do not have the capacity to take on more. Does the cabinet secretary therefore accept that relying on community-led initiatives is not a substitute for properly funded local government?

Shona Robison: We have confirmation from the Accounts Commission of real-terms increases to local government funding for this year and the past two years at least, which helps to protect services and deliver for local communities. I point out to Alexander Stewart that at no point, so far as I am aware, has any member of his party made local government funding a key priority in the budget discussions. Perhaps there needs to be a little bit more communication of what the priorities are from the Conservative benches.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The North West Glasgow Voluntary Sector Network supports, connects and advocates for

organisations providing vital services to the people who live in the north-west of Glasgow, many of them from some of the most deprived areas. All that could end in March, however, because it was told this week that it is losing its funding. What can the cabinet secretary do to help the network, and will she work with me to ask the council to rethink the decision to defund that critical service?

Shona Robison: As Pam Duncan-Glancy will know, it is for councils to make decisions about the various organisations that receive funding in their areas. We also provide considerable funding to third sector organisations. If Pam Duncan-Glancy would like to furnish me with further details, I would be happy to communicate with her about that particular group.

Planning Applications (Job Creation)

2. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how the planning process monitors the delivery of any job creation figures included within planning applications, including applications for salmon farms, once they are built and operational. (S6O-05268)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Planning authorities may monitor developments to consider whether they have been carried out in line with approved plans and conditions, which must have a planning purpose. They can also take enforcement action where appropriate. However, it is not the role of the planning system to monitor the number of jobs that are created as a consequence of any grant of planning permission. Planning decisions are made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decision makers identify the considerations that are, in planning terms, material to the determination of the application.

Ariane Burgess: Recent independent research indicated that job numbers in salmon farm applications may be significantly overstated, for example by applying job figures per pen even where pens will be empty on rotation. Does the Scottish Government agree that it should adopt best practice by analysing and verifying job creation claims before approval and after farms are established to ensure that there is transparency and accuracy in decision making?

Ivan McKee: The salmon farming sector and its wider supply chain are an important employer in Scotland, particularly in our coastal and island communities. An independent report on the sector's economic impact, which was commissioned by Salmon Scotland and published last month, showed that Scotland's salmon farming sector supports 10,850 jobs in Scotland and contributed £953 million gross value added to

the national economy in 2024. On any individual case, it is for the planning authority to satisfy itself as to the accuracy of any information that is provided in support of an application and to decide how much weight to give to any particular material consideration when deciding on the application.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): There are 3,600 businesses across the country that are involved in the Scottish salmon supply chain. That includes W&J Knox in Kilbirnie, which supplies new nets and ancillary products, as well as washing, sterilising and repairing existing stock items, employing more than 60 people locally in my constituency. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is important that figures on job creation and sustained jobs include the wider supply chain?

Ivan McKee: As I indicated in my previous answer, the salmon farming sector, together with its associated supply chain, is a significant source of employment in Scotland, particularly in coastal and island communities. Mr Gibson rightly underscored the essential contribution that fish farming makes not only through direct employment but, as the business in his constituency illustrates, through the extensive economic activity that is generated across the wider supply chain.

Aberdeen City Council (Support)

3. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting Aberdeen City Council to maintain its local government services, including in response to any increasing social need in the city. (S6O-05269)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): The 2025-26 budget delivered record funding of more than £15.1 billion for local government, which was a real-terms increase of 5.5 per cent. As part of the record funding package for local government, Aberdeen City Council will receive £505.1 million to support day-to-day services, which equates to an extra £37.5 million or an additional 8 per cent compared to 2024-25.

Jackie Dunbar: Aberdeen Cyrenians, which is a charity that supports people across Aberdeen who are facing poverty and homelessness, has warned that reforming the energy profits levy

"is not just an economic imperative, it's a moral one",

which is needed to prevent a "spiral of decline" and social harm in the city that no amount of welfare spending can reverse. Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns about the impact of Labour's fiscal policies on local communities in my constituency? Will she say any more about the Scottish Government's work with local authorities to mitigate that impact?

Shona Robison: I share Jackie Dunbar's concern that the retention of the reserved energy profits levy risks further consequences for jobs and investment across Scotland's energy sector over the coming weeks, months and years. I assure her that the Scottish Government will continue to do what it can with the powers that are available to us, working alongside partners such as local authorities and trade unions, to support the energy workforce. Through our just transition fund and the energy transition fund, more than £120 million has already been invested in the north-east to support the region's transition to net zero.

Energy Profits Levy (North East Scotland)

4. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its engagement with the United Kingdom Government regarding the energy profits levy and its implications for North East Scotland. (S6O-05270)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): When the First Minister met the Prime Minister last week, he made it clear that the UK Government must act now or run the risk of delivering irreversible deindustrialisation and decline in Scotland's economy. The energy industry is facing an existential threat unless it gets the support that it needs from the UK Government—including the removal of the energy profits levy—to help to ensure that there is a just transition from oil and gas to renewables that protects skills and delivers a pipeline of future investment.

Audrey Nicoll: The replacement windfall tax mechanism ignores the fact that the industry needs certainty now, as job losses are already reaching levels of around 1,000 a month. Furthermore, the EPL undermines the shift to a balanced energy mix, as the loss of the requisite skills and experience from the north-east gathers pace. Most alarming of all, HM Treasury stipulates that a windfall occurs only at a Brent oil price of around \$95, which is a price that has not been seen in three years. That means that the EPL is, according to the Government's own determination, unwarranted.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that retaining the EPL until 2030 risks thousands of avoidable North Sea job losses and that, instead, bringing forward the new oil and gas price mechanism to 2026 will protect jobs, stimulate investment and deliver much-needed energy and job security?

Shona Robison: I agree very much with Audrey Nicoll's proposition. I share the concern that the retention of the energy profits levy risks further consequences for jobs and investment across

Scotland's energy sector over the coming weeks, months and years. As the First Minister set out to the Prime Minister last week, the energy industry will continue to face a threat unless it gets the support that it needs from the UK Government. The First Minister pressed that point very firmly. Such support must include an urgent transition from the EPL to a fairer fiscal mechanism, to help to ensure that there is a just transition from oil and gas to renewables that protects skills and delivers a future investment pipeline.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): With the likes of Stephen Flynn and John Swinney previously demanding an even higher EPL and one without investment allowances, I am very pleased that the Scottish National Party has reversed its position to align with Conservative calls to scrap the levy. Will the Government now also reverse its presumption against oil and gas, which is doing so much damage to north-east jobs and the north-east economy?

Shona Robison: That is very much a rewriting of the history of the energy profits levy. It was the Conservatives who introduced the EPL, and we did not support its extension to 2029, which happened under the previous Conservative UK Government, or its further extension to 2030 and the increase in the rate that was confirmed at last year's UK autumn budget. The Conservatives are fooling no one on this point.

High Street Retailers in South Scotland (Budget)

5. Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it will take in its budget to support high street retailers in the South Scotland region that are at risk of closing. (S6O-05271)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The 2026-27 Scottish budget will be published and presented to Parliament on 13 January 2026. Further details will be available at that stage.

Carol Mochan: Retailers are often the largest employers of young people in our communities, yet more high street shops in my region are closing, or choosing not to open, because of high business rates, and that trend is contributing to our growing youth unemployment. Our current rates put us at a disadvantage compared with other parts of the United Kingdom. What will the Scottish Government do to provide relief to get our local economies moving?

Ivan McKee: The Scottish Government is listening to all interested parties, industry sectors and others as we collect information, analyse the data that is required and make the decisions for the budget for 2026-27, which, as I indicated, will

be presented to Parliament on 13 January next year.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): The minister will be aware that, across South Scotland and beyond, reassessments of non-domestic rates bills are causing very real concern to businesses, particularly in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. One small pub in a rural community has been given a draft rateable value of £24,700, up from £9,474; last week, a restaurant in Edinburgh that faced a rates increase of 54 per cent announced its closure with immediate effect; and a bed-and-breakfast business that has been operating for 17 years faces a 116 per cent increase that could well put it out of business. Will the minister now urgently intervene and ensure that bills do not rise for businesses next year, otherwise it will be the last Christmas for many pubs, restaurants and shops?

Ivan McKee: The revaluation process is carried out by independent assessors, but I am aware of the concern and have had communication from businesses on the points that Craig Hoy raised. We continue to look at the challenging economic conditions and the pressure that rates bills put on businesses.

Family Protection Insurance Plan

6. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what communication the finance secretary has had with the United Kingdom Government and the Financial Conduct Authority regarding what support is available for policyholders impacted by the withdrawal of the family protection plan by CMutual and Maiden Life Försäkrings. (S6O-05272)

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): On 21 November, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government wrote to Lucy Rigby, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, to highlight the concerns of Scottish credit unions and their members. The chief executive of the Financial Conduct Authority received a copy of that letter. I subsequently met representatives of the FCA on 3 December to discuss the matter. Although the regulation of financial services is a matter reserved to the UK Government, we will continue to engage with all parties to help to secure the best outcome for those affected.

Richard Leonard: Ten days ago, thousands of elderly people, many in our most deprived communities, had their family protection plan unilaterally cancelled by CMutual. I understand that, since then, at least seven people in Scotland, who had paid in good faith for that plan, have died without cover, so I thank the Minister for Business and Employment for meeting some of those

affected when they visited the Parliament two weeks ago. I also want to recognise that the UK Government has offered to bring stakeholders together. Will the Scottish Government urgently convene a rapid response group, involving the coalition of independent credit unions, to find a solution, at this very distressing time, and so stand with and stand up for the victims of this national scandal?

Richard Lochhead: The Scottish Government will continue to engage with those affected. As the member knows well, we very much share his concerns and the concerns that have been expressed by MSPs from across the parties on the issue.

A few days ago, I had a further meeting with Elaine Rae, who represents the Scottish League of Credit Unions. As I mentioned, I also met representatives of the FCA. We will continue that engagement. During our meeting, as well as addressing general issues on which it could not go into detail—for legal reasons, as it has not yet reached conclusions on what it is looking at—the FCA said that perhaps 5,000 people across the UK are affected, 1,000 of whom are aged 80 or over and so might not be eligible for an alternative product. A number of those 1,000 people will reside in Scotland, so we should be concerned about them, particularly given the time of year and the anxiety that the issue is causing.

I assure the member that we continue to engage with the credit unions at the UK level—but particularly at the Scottish level and with the Scottish League of Credit Unions—as well as with the FCA. As I indicated, we have also made representations to the UK Government.

RAAC (Support for Local Authorities)

7. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how much it will allocate in its forthcoming budget to local authorities to provide financial support to those affected by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, including businesses. (S6O-05273)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): The 2026-27 Scottish budget will be published and presented to the Parliament on 13 January next year, and further details will be available at that stage. We expect every local authority in Scotland to keep those affected by RAAC up to date with guidance and support to help to manage this issue. We are keen to work with councils on exploring solutions, such as flexibility to support more affordable housing projects in their area to create the fiscal headroom needed.

Fulton MacGregor: This week, I met representatives of four small local businesses that had been based on Main Street in Coatbridge but had been forced to relocate in what they had been told was an emergency due to the presence of RAAC in an adjoining property.

That has led to massive financial and personal costs to those businesses, whose operators tell me that they have no financial support and very little practical support from the council, despite them believing that support had been promised at a previous council meeting and despite them having taken, in good faith, the advice that the council gave them. The council says that the businesses do not fit the criteria for any of its current grants. Surely that is not right. Those businesses support a town centre that is already in trouble, and they provide valuable employment.

What more can the Scottish Government do to enable local authorities to provide support to businesses in such exceptional circumstances, thereby reducing the risk of our high streets going into further decline?

Shona Robison: I recognise that this is a difficult time for businesses that are affected by RAAC, and Fulton MacGregor has laid out the impact on such businesses in his area. We encourage all business owners to follow the guidance that is available, including that from the Institution of Structural Engineers. However, I will be happy to look further into the matter if the member will share the details with me.

Tax Thresholds (Budget)

8. Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what plans it has to amend tax thresholds in the next Scottish budget. (S6O-05274)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): As is normal, we will outline our income tax policy decisions in the Scottish budget, which for the year 2026-27 will be published on 13 January 2026.

Tim Eagle: Labour's decision to freeze income tax thresholds—which was unsurprising, given what Labour has been doing in government—pulls more ordinary workers into higher tax bands. Although the Scottish National Party has criticised the Labour budget, it is doing the same in Scotland. In 2018, an experienced teacher's salary sat at around £9,000 below the higher rate threshold, whereas, next year, that same teacher will be at around £9,000 above it. I do not see how that can be fair. Does the cabinet secretary accept that the continuation of threshold freezes is nothing more than a stealth tax on working people

at a time when they need more money in their pockets?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government has introduced many measures that have put more money into people's pockets, including the Scottish child payment, which has meant that Scotland is the only part of these islands with falling child poverty rates. We expect those with the broadest shoulders to pay a bit more; however, we will deliver a budget that will be fair to households, fund public services and continue our ambition to eradicate child poverty.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on finance and local government. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business, to allow members on front benches to change.

Social Security Spending

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-20056, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on controlling the rising benefits bill in Scotland. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:48

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Once again, it falls to the Scottish Conservatives to highlight the ever-increasing benefits bill that Scottish taxpayers face. My motion highlights the unsustainable social security spending commitments that the Scottish National Party Government has made since it received significant powers over benefits in 2016.

I will make it clear: when we say that the SNP's rising benefits bill is unsustainable, we mean it. The SNP spends more on benefits than it does on our schools or our police. One in seven pounds of the Government's spend goes on the benefits budget.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission has forecast that the Scottish benefits bill will rise to £9 billion by 2029-30. The SNP has already spent £1.2 billion each year on top of what it receives in block grant adjustments. By 2029-30, the figure is forecast to hit a shocking £2 billion.

Audit Scotland has said:

"The Scottish Government has not yet set out a detailed strategy for how it will manage the forecast gap between social security funding and spending within its overall budget."

That is a damning indictment. However, it is not surprising, because the SNP has so far shown no intention of getting its benefits bill under control. It does not see doing so as a priority.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind): Would the member like to outline which devolved benefits he would take away and how he would do that?

Alexander Stewart: We need to have a discussion about universality in benefits. We have already spoken about the SNP's light touch when it comes to keeping records on benefits, and that is a vitally important matter. We want to see the economy grow and we want to get people off benefits and into the job market, so that they can prosper and move forward.

The amount spent on adult disability payment is the largest of all the devolved benefits and is the biggest contributor to the SNP's overspend in that area. By 2029-30, ADP alone will cost Scottish taxpayers £770 million more than the equivalent UK benefit would have.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Can the member tell the chamber whether the Scottish Conservatives voted for or against all of the secondary legislation that built in the eligibility for ADP, which he is about to criticise?

Alexander Stewart: I think that you will find that the Conservatives did vote for it, but you have to understand that your light-touch approach, which I will come on to speak about later—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Alexander Stewart: We will speak about that light-touch approach and we can discuss the number of people who, as part of the benefits process, have been receiving funds in error or due to fraud.

As I said, it is expected that, by 2029-30, ADP will cost £770 million more than the equivalent UK benefit would have done. The ADP's light-touch review system might be one of the biggest drivers of this increase in cost compared with the personal independence payment system in the UK. The current review system allows claimants to self-declare that their circumstances have not changed. All they need to do is tick a box on a form, so it is hardly surprising that the Auditor General concluded that

"Social Security Scotland does not have a reliable figure for the amount lost to fraud and error".

A recent freedom of information request revealed that Social Security Scotland had reported only 29 cases of fraud since 2023-24. That is compared with the thousands of cases that are likely to have happened. If the SNP is at all serious about addressing spiralling benefit costs, it must look at its naive approach to fraud and error.

Our motion also speaks about the UK Government's decision to remove the two-child limit. In the coming years, that decision will cost UK taxpayers at least £2 billion extra, which will put a strain on our public services. In the current climate, that is not the right priority for the UK or Scottish Governments, and we cannot support the decision.

The SNP had already set aside £155 million, which could have been spent elsewhere, to remove the cap in Scotland. How long has it been since we have seen that across the UK? I hope that £155 million will be used to support hard-working families and taxpayers.

However, the First Minister has already confirmed that the extra money will be added straight back on to Scotland's benefits bill.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Stewart: I am running out of time.

If that decision does not sum up the SNP Government's high-tax, high-welfare approach to government, I do not know what does.

Having spent years complaining about the previous UK Government's approach to benefits, the SNP is now discovering that it is not as easy as it looks. In 2017, the estimated cost of setting up the Scottish Government's in-house benefits agency, Social Security Scotland, was £300 million and, by 2023, that had blossomed to £700 million.

The Government refuses to learn any lessons and, judging by Shirley-Anne Somerville's amendment, that will not change any time soon. The amendment not only ignores the £2 billion spending gap, but calls for the UK Labour Government to increase the UK's benefits bill even further.

The Labour amendment at least acknowledges the funding gap that exists. However, it also celebrates Labour's decision to remove the two-child limit by increasing taxes on working people. We therefore cannot support the amendment.

Scotland's benefits system should be an essential safety net for those who need assistance. We can all agree on that principle. The Scottish Conservatives believe that this system must be fair and affordable. We must ensure that the spiralling costs are not balanced on the backs of hard-working Scottish taxpayers. That is where we differ from all other parties in the chamber, because the left-wing consensus does not want to accept those principles. The scale of the problem is such that it is too big for the SNP Government to ignore. Instead of burying its head in the sand, this is the time for the Government to be honest with Scottish taxpayers about how it will fix the mess that it has created.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that social security spending by the Scottish Government and its future social security spending commitments are unsustainable; notes the report published by Audit Scotland in September 2025, *Adult Disability Payment*; further notes that the Audit Scotland report highlights a "funding gap for devolved social security spending of £2.0 billion by 2029/30"; calls on the Scottish Government to explain why, according to Audit Scotland, it "has not yet set out a detailed strategy for how it will manage the forecast gap between social security funding and spending"; believes that raising taxes in order to remove the limit on the child element of Universal Credit was not the right priority for either the Scottish Government or the UK Government, and calls on the Scottish Government to use the money that it will save, as a result of the UK Government's decision, to lower costs for people across Scotland by instead cutting income tax.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Shirley-Anne Somerville to speak to and move amendment S6M-20056.3.

14:55

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We have just heard the Scottish Conservatives set out an apparent repudiation of the benefits system that this Parliament voted for unanimously, and which I am proud that we have established. The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 was unequivocal in enshrining in statute the principle that social security is an essential investment in the people of Scotland, based on dignity, fairness and respect. It is a safety net for us all, because we may all need it at some point in our lives.

Like Mr Stewart, I am unwavering in those principles, which are even more important today than they were seven years ago, particularly because of the cost of living crisis that was brought on by Brexit. I am also unwavering, as is the First Minister, on this Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty. That is why it is so remarkable and, quite frankly, grotesque to hear politicians still championing the two-child limit, despite the fact that it was condemning 20,000 children in Scotland to unnecessary additional hardship.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary recognise that there is considerable public support for the two-child cap, because it is seen to be about the incentives that are given to families? The debate about social security should be about incentives and whether people feel that benefits are more productive or whether being in work carries a greater incentive.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank Liz Smith for her question, but it is important to recognise that, contrary to some of the incorrect narratives that are currently in play, the Resolution Foundation has set out very clearly that the abolition of the two-child limit helps working families, because three in five families that are set to benefit from its scrapping include at least one person in work. What genuinely disappoints me is the othering of poor people and of those who require social security support.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will make some progress, if Mr Hoy will forgive me.

Who knows what will happen in our lives? A marriage break-up or caring responsibilities could make it very difficult for a family that had been coping well financially to deal with subsequent circumstances. I am not going to turn my back on those children, even if the Scottish Conservatives are.

Our benefit investment is fully funded, and that is exactly because we balance our budget every year.

Craig Hoy: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If Mr Hoy had wanted more time, he should have given the whole afternoon to this debate, and I would have been delighted to discuss the issue with him in further detail.

We balance our budget every year, despite more than a decade of welfare cuts from successive UK Governments. We recognise the fiscal challenges that face the public finances, which is why we have a strategy and a plan in place for a sustainable path. Let us be very clear that the budget process is under way, but this SNP Government will stand resolutely behind the support that we deliver for people. Unlike Westminster, we will not be cutting support for disabled people, and we will never accept cruel policies such as the two-child limit.

On future spending, it is important to emphasise that the proportion of the resource budget that the Scottish Government has chosen to invest in enhancing social security—compared with the proportion invested in England and Wales—is projected to increase by less than 1 per cent by 2029-30 compared with the current financial year. Other than retaining the two-child limit, we have still to hear—despite the point being raised this afternoon—which one of the benefits the Conservatives would cut. Would they cut benefits from disabled people or their carers, whom I met this morning, or from those on low incomes, including those who are in work?

Mr Stewart mentioned the adult disability payment in particular. The expenditure on ADP is indeed forecast to exceed the value of the block grant, because we have chosen to take a fairer approach. I note the comments from the Auditor General for Scotland, when he said:

“We assess that this has been a successful project.”—*[Official Report, Public Audit Committee, 1 October 2025; c 4.]*

I note that the Resolution Foundation, in an update that it published on Monday, said:

“the introduction of ADP shows that improving the claimant experience is not at odds with keeping caseloads and costs under control”.

It also said that

“By 2025, there is no evidence that ADP is a more leniently-awarded benefit than PIP”,

and that

“the latest data does not suggest that ADP is a ‘soft touch’.”

We have a benefits system that is robust but fair. It is an investment in the people of Scotland. I

am sorry that the Scottish Conservatives feel that they wish to turn their backs on the people of Scotland; that perhaps points towards some of the polling evidence that we have seen today. Nevertheless, we will continue to bring forward a social security system that works for, and delivers for, the people of Scotland, and I am proud to take that to the people next year.

I move amendment S6M-20056.3, to leave out from first “believes” to end and insert:

“reaffirms its commitment to the social security principles contained in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and unanimously adopted by the Parliament, including that social security is an investment in the people of Scotland and is itself a human right; welcomes the abolition of the two-child limit across the UK; calls on the UK Labour administration to go further and scrap other damaging welfare reforms implemented by the previous UK administration, including the benefit cap, and supports the Scottish Government’s commitment to reinvest funding to end the two-child limit in further measures to tackle child poverty in Scotland.”

15:01

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I begin by addressing the framing of the debate. Titling the motion “Controlling the Rising Benefits Bill” is not just unhelpful; it misunderstands the purpose of social security. Social security is not a discretionary pot to be constrained according to political taste. It is a lifeline—it should be demanded, it is rights-based and it is essential to supporting people through hardship with dignity.

When we talk about social security, we are talking about families who are trying to keep their heads above water, people who are sick or disabled and children who deserve the security and opportunity that far too many are denied. Reducing the debate to a question of control risks stripping away the humanity and responsibility that should underpin these decisions.

Liz Smith: The debate ought to be about incentives. It is absolutely fine that the current benefit system provides for those who are most in need. The issue is the system’s attraction for other people who could well be in work but are not seeking it, because there is no incentive for them to go to work. That is what the debate should be about, is it not?

Claire Baker: The evidence shows that, unfortunately, the two-child cap just led to more people living in poverty; it did not do anything to incentivise people into employment. I agree that the way out of poverty is through employment, but the policies that the previous UK Government introduced did not manage to achieve any of that.

The Labour amendment sets out the challenges clearly. Audit Scotland has raised serious concerns about a £2 billion funding gap in

devolved social security spending by 2029-30, and it has highlighted the absence of any detailed Scottish Government plan to deal with that.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will Claire Baker give way on that point?

Claire Baker: I am very short of time—sorry.

The Scottish Government has chosen to expand entitlements, but those choices must be matched with credible financial planning. Warm words do not fund commitments; responsible government does.

The announcement in the UK budget of the removal of the two-child limit is a significant anti-poverty measure, and it should be welcomed. It will lift an estimated 450,000 children across the UK out of poverty, including around 95,000 in Scotland. It is the single most cost-effective action to drive down child poverty rates, and it is unquestionably the right thing to do.

Let us be clear: the two-child cap was—as I have said—a deliberate Conservative policy choice, and it pushed families into poverty and imposed long-term costs on health, education and economic potential. Removing it was the right thing to do, and the decision was taken at the right time, when it could be delivered sustainably and responsibly.

However, the nature of child poverty has changed. Nearly three quarters of children in poverty in Scotland are in working households. Poverty today is not simply an issue of unemployment—it is about low pay, insecurity and the rising cost of essential goods. That is why action such as increasing the national living wage, raising the basic rate of universal credit, supporting energy bills and strengthening employment rights matter. Those measures help working families to stay afloat.

In Scotland, after 18 years of SNP Government, relative child poverty after housing costs has fallen by just 1 per cent. The Government's own targets will not be met unless there is urgent action in the areas where it has fallen short. That must include investing properly in employability services, rather than cutting £30 million from budgets, and addressing Scotland's housing emergency, which currently leaves 10,000 children in temporary accommodation.

We cannot talk seriously about tackling poverty without addressing the central role of work. For those who can work, secure employment is the most sustainable route out of poverty. Parents need flexible work options, affordable childcare and targeted support to enable them to get into, and progress in, the labour market. Too many young people are not in education, employment or training. The disability employment gap in

Scotland is wider than that in the rest of the UK, with almost 300,000 working-age people in Scotland out of work because of illness.

In conclusion, Scotland needs a Government that sets out a credible plan for funding its commitments; that aligns social security with opportunity; and that uses every lever at its disposal to improve people's lives.

I move amendment S6M-20056.2, to leave out from first "believes" to end and insert:

"notes with concern Audit Scotland's recent assessment of a 'funding gap for devolved social security spending of £2.0 billion by 2029/30' and the absence of a 'detailed strategy for how [the Scottish Government] will manage the forecast gap between social security funding and spending'; welcomes the announcement in the 2025 UK Budget of the removal of the two-child limit for universal credit, noting that this will lift an estimated 450,000 children across the UK out of poverty and that, in the assessment of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'the projected fall in child poverty over the current parliament would be the biggest on record'; believes that this must be followed by a renewed focus in Scotland on tackling the causes of poverty and boosting the means of defeating it, such as employability, housing and education, and further believes that the long-term solution to breaking the generational cycle of poverty in Scotland must include supporting people into sustainable and well-paid work."

15:05

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Our social security system embodies the duty that we have to one another. It provides a best start grant when a new Scot is born and the Scottish child payment as the child grows. When the young person enters work for the first time, they might be able to claim their job start grant and, when they die—much later in life, I hope—the funeral support payment ensures that they will be laid to rest with dignity. I ask the Conservatives: what do they want to cut? Clearly, they would prefer to keep the two-child limit and rape clause in place, despite the overwhelming evidence that they have caused significant increases in child poverty. The estimated 20,000 children who have been brought out of poverty through lifting the cap would go straight back into it if the Tories had their way.

Craig Hoy: Does Maggie Chapman accept that the interplay between universal credit and the Scottish child payment is resulting in some people choosing not to work additional hours, and that they would be willing to do so had that mechanism not been put in place?

Maggie Chapman: Quite frankly, I think that that has more to do with problems with universal credit than anything else—the restrictions that are placed on people who want to work a few additional hours instead of full time.

Social security should be seen as an investment in our economy as well as our people. We know that money that is paid out in social security circulates in local economies and is spent in local businesses. The End Child Poverty coalition estimates that local economies would benefit by as much as £19 million annually per constituency by lifting the cap. In Alexander Stewart's region, Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy would regain £2.5 million, and Russell Findlay's constituents in Paisley and Renfrewshire North and South would together get £4 million back. Next time that they knock on doors, they will need to look their poorer constituents in the eye and explain why they do not want that money to be put back into their pockets and their communities.

As if the disaster of PIP was not enough, perhaps they want to take the money from the adult disability payment. However, the truth is that, as with so many payments, ADP is helping too few people and not too many. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat for a second, Ms Chapman.

Unbelievably, a conversation is going on from a sedentary position between two members of front-bench teams, which is extremely discourteous to Ms Chapman and the chamber.

Maggie Chapman: Of those who have applied for ADP in the past year, 63 per cent have been rejected, which is worse than for PIP—the independent Scottish Fiscal Commission and the Resolution Foundation agree on that—and we know that many people do not get the right decision the first time. During the ADP's short history, 60,000 people have asked for a second opinion. Some have had to go all the way to court to get what they are owed. That shows that we need more money in those kinds of social security payments, not less, as the Scottish Conservatives seem to be arguing.

I agree with the cabinet secretary about the need to have a social security system that is there for us all in case we need it, but disabled people are struggling now. When I raised that last week, the Minister for Equalities did not answer my question about what changes, if any, have been made in Social Security Scotland to lead to the change in the figures. I hope that the cabinet secretary can tell us why so many of the stats are going in the wrong direction: there are more rejections, more appeals and fewer people getting the highest rates that they deserve.

The Conservatives ran the social security system across the UK for 14 years. The motion is evidence, as if any more were needed, that the party learned nothing from its mistakes—not from those who took their own lives out of despair because of benefit sanctions and losing disability

support, and not from the increase by thousands of per cent in the number of food parcels that are given out because social security does not meet people's basic daily needs. The Conservatives have not learned that, if we want a society that is prosperous, fair and equal, a social security system for all is vital.

15:09

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I want a caring system that respects people when they are in need. That is why the Liberal Democrats supported the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, and why we believe in the fairness, dignity and respect approach. We believed that, when we were creating a new welfare state, we needed to come together to create those new central powers for it.

One of my constituents told me that, unlike under the previous Department for Work and Pensions system, she was believed—and her face showed the relief of being believed. She was right to think that she deserved that respect, and that is why I was pleased that that approach had filtered through into the Scottish system. It is also why I am pleased that the two-child limit has gone, because, in effect, it was punishing the children rather than the adults. That is not an appropriate way to manage a welfare system.

However, we can agree that the current system is unsustainable and that, when we reach it, the forecasted £2 billion gap will test us quite considerably. It is also true that the levels of economic inactivity—said to be one in four or one in five; the figures fluctuate—are too high. That means not only that there is a significant burden on the social security system but that we are losing valuable taxpayers to our economy.

On both fronts, the system is not sustainable. I think that we can all accept that we face an enormous challenge, but I am more concerned about the impact on individuals, because the level of economic inactivity in Scotland is far too high.

Unlike in the 1980s and 1990s, when those who were economically inactive were primarily men who had worked in industrial complexes and whose bodies were battered and bruised, we are now talking about younger people who are neurodivergent or who have mental health issues. We cannot afford for them to be economically inactive for the rest of their lives.

In the 1980s and 1990s, those men lost perhaps about 20 years' worth of economic activity. If we do not support into work the people who I have just mentioned, they will be lost to work for the rest of their lives, which will be bad for them and for our economy. We need to deal with that.

The most depressing thing about the debate is the silo mentality that surrounds it. We must have rounded services that help those people. I have an example of a young person in my constituency in his 20s. When he was at school, he received support for his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. When he left school, he went off the rails. He has been lost to the economy for four years now, because there is no adult neurodivergent service in Fife. That situation is replicated across the country.

What is the national health service doing? Does it not understand that it is important that it orientates its services to help the economy? If we do not get those people back to work, we will not be able to raise the taxes to pay for the vital NHS services that we rely on. We must have a rounded system.

Stephen Kerr: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Willie Rennie: I have only 30 seconds left.

I know that the Deputy First Minister has been leading some work on that, but the situation is urgent. We need to align all our services and focus on the one in four or one in five people who are economically inactive. We must provide the required services—not just in relation to the skills, housing and other things that are referred to in the Labour amendment, but in relation to the NHS. We must ensure that we are focused on getting them back to work for their own sake, for the sake of our taxes and for the sake of the economy.

15:13

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This debate is important not just because of the persistent warnings from the Scottish Fiscal Commission, Audit Scotland and all the other economic forecasters that the ballooning welfare bill is seriously threatening the fiscal sustainability of Scotland's future, but because they believe that the system is not sufficiently transparent and the Scottish Government is not sufficiently accountable for the decisions that it makes. The Auditor General confirmed that at the Finance and Public Administration Committee yesterday. He is rightly complaining that the Scottish Government is not sufficiently transparent in explaining how its tax policies contribute to the Scottish budget policy profile or, just as important, which of them do that.

Another reason why the debate is important is because far too many politicians, including Scottish ministers, shy away from the problems, especially just before an election, in the hope that they will go away. Of course, they will not go away, because they are now so serious. As Fraser Nelson wrote yesterday in his latest article, we will not solve that problem if we indulge only in a

political “blame game”. We are all guilty of ignoring the extent of the problem.

By the way, on Mr Balfour's point, as members will have heard me say before, one of my frustrations in this Parliament is that we seem to continually avoid the necessary debate about which universal payments should be our priority and which should not be. If I remember correctly, not that long ago, when the cabinet secretary was at the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, she rightly set out that the Government is facing the issue of not being able to roll out free school meals to the extent that it would like to. The cabinet secretary has to accept that there are issues for the Scottish Government.

Jeremy Balfour: Will the member give way on that point?

Liz Smith: I will come back to the member in a minute.

Alexander Stewart set out the stark facts that we have to face. I will not rehearse them again, but I point out that most commentators believe that a large part of the problem is down to the lighter-touch approach to welfare applications, with fewer tough questions for applicants to answer and fewer rejections of applications.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member give way?

Liz Smith: I think that Mr Balfour's intervention might be on the same point.

Jeremy Balfour: Liz Smith knows that I absolutely agree with her on the issue of universalism and benefits. However, on the issue that Mr Stewart raised and that I think that Liz Smith is trying to develop, I note that ADP actually helps people into employment. If we take ADP away from people, there might be a negative effect, with more people ending up in unemployment. Does she recognise that ADP might be the wrong benefit to go after?

Liz Smith: I certainly acknowledge how important ADP is, and Mr Balfour is right that it takes people into work. However, we have to look at the exponential increase in it. That is a matter of concern, and it is something that the Scottish Conservatives have been pursuing for some time.

One issue is the exacerbation of the economic inactivity problem, which is a serious labour market issue for a number of sectors. If it becomes more financially comfortable to be on benefits and, at the same time, more expensive for employers to employ people because of rising costs, including Labour's national insurance charges, the outcome is predictable. In other words, it would be much better if the welfare debate was more about the balance of incentives rather than mud slinging, which happens all too often.

To sum up, those of us who argue that there should be constraints on this social benefit aspect are often told that we lack compassion and decency and that our stance is immoral. I completely and utterly reject that assertion. It is not doing anything that would be lacking in compassion and decency, not just because of the long-term effects on benefit claimants but because of the long-term effects on Scotland.

15:18

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am glad that we have the opportunity to debate the issue today, not because I agree with the motion—actually, I fundamentally disagree with the framing of social security as a cost instead of an investment in the people of Scotland—but because I recognise that there is a concerted effort by some to claw back money from those who need it most, in the name of being responsible. It would not be responsible for a Government to leave people in poverty. Those of us who know how damaging that is need to take every opportunity that we can to speak up against that and bring the debate back to the basics. We must decide whether, as a country, we want to support people with the essentials—food, heating and health—and eradicate poverty, or protect and expand the disgusting wealth gap that already exists in the UK.

The motion specifically mentions adult disability payment. Let me remind Parliament why ADP is essential. We replaced the cruel and demeaning process of personal independence payment—a system that was based on suspicion and targets—with a process built on dignity, fairness and respect. Today, the Tories seem to want to bring us back to that suspicion and those dehumanising targets. If the Audit Scotland report confirms high demand for ADP, that is because demand is high and people now have a fairer and more compassionate system to turn to. We cannot then turn them away or deny them their dignity.

At a time when we are doing all that we can to reduce child poverty in our communities and people across Scotland are still struggling with the cost of living, prioritising the cutting of tax would be absurd. Tax exists to support the common good, and I am happy that my taxes in Scotland go towards ending child poverty. Now that the UK Government has finally done the right thing and scrapped the two-child cap, the money that we had started to spend on mitigating it in Scotland should go towards extra efforts to support families.

When Alexander Stewart's party was in power as the previous UK Government, not only did it cut social security spending, but the Tories embarked on a systemic and sustained tearing apart of the security net that is supposed to exist to prevent

anyone—including children, disabled people and pensioners—from falling below a minimum standard such that they cannot afford to eat.

Liz Smith: If Emma Roddick is correct in that, can I ask her where she feels that the revenue should be found in order to finance welfare, because it is a huge, fat bill?

Emma Roddick: It is a huge investment in people who otherwise struggle to be productive, active members of society. We are talking about children and disabled people—there is no world where it is legitimate to allow them to fall into poverty rather than support them financially to be productive members of society.

That safety net, which was torn apart, will not be fixed with one change, and the Scottish Government has a huge job to rebuild it. Such an undertaking would not be an easy job even for those who are in charge at a UK level, but it is even harder for a devolved Government that works within constraints and at the whim of a UK Government. Unfortunately, the topic of today's debate is a good example of that.

The Scottish Government stepped up to do the necessary work because the UK Government refused to scrap the two-child cap, despite knowing about the damage that it was doing. The UK Government has now taken action, but it did so late, so the Scottish Government has had to readjust priorities and take a new approach. It is possible to be at once glad that the two-child cap will not apply anywhere in the UK, which it should not, and frustrated about the constant difficulty that our sustained and comprehensive approach in Scotland has been held back because we did not know what the UK Government would do next.

The forecast funding gap is a huge challenge and it is concerning, but it does not inherently mean that the priorities that the Scottish Government has set out should be criticised. The fact that the UK Government's spending choices and the resulting block grant that is given to Scotland do not provide enough money to tackle poverty is a problem. The fact that the Scottish Government is having to try to tackle types of poverty that are a direct result of past UK policies is a problem. The fact that people will still struggle after this one change is also a problem, but that means that we need further investment and not reprioritisation.

15:22

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I am quite concerned by the speech that we have just heard, but there are some members in the chamber who do not believe that the rules of economics are completely optional.

Audit Scotland's 2025 report on adult disability payment should serve as a wake-up call to every member of the Parliament. It sets out in clear and unambiguous terms how unstable devolved social security finances are. The report projects a £2 billion funding gap by 2029-30 across devolved benefits—a gap that the Scottish Government has no credible plan to close. This is not a responsible or sustainable Government and it is certainly not fair to the people of Scotland, who are constantly called on to foot the bill.

Working families—the very taxpayers whom the Government claims to champion—are already paying the price. Middle-income households, teachers, nurseries, police officers and small business owners pay significantly more here than they would pay in other parts of the UK. What do they receive in return? They get a devolved social security system that is overspending by hundreds of millions of pounds a year, with no fiscal strategy or contingency plan in place whatsoever.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that individuals with disabilities and those who fall on hard times deserve help through benefits, but that does not absolve any Government if it avoids fiscal responsibility. People expect their taxes to be managed wisely. Instead, they face the possibility of increased taxation or reductions in essential public services while the benefits system runs at its current scale. Audit Scotland could not have been clearer: the Scottish Government is expanding entitlements faster than it can fund them, and it is doing so without transparency or long-term financial planning.

Speaking of holding people's taxes to ransom, I note that the UK Labour Government, under Rachel Reeves, has announced that it will abolish the two-child limit on UK-wide benefits. In the budget, she froze income tax and national insurance thresholds—moves that the independent fiscal watchdog, the Office for Budget Responsibility, says will push more people into higher tax bands. That is the same chancellor who promised that working people would not pay more in tax, but she now has to admit that ordinary families must contribute more.

That raises a fundamental question for the Scottish Parliament: is providing benefits the only way to support families? We have to be honest—it is not. Instead, our focus should be on supporting families, especially when it comes to raising children.

One of the biggest challenges that families face today is the affordability of childcare. The Scottish Government has all but forgotten the promise that it made to expand funded childcare for those aged nine months and onwards. If it was truly serious about supporting families with children, it would do so, as it promised, providing affordable and

flexible early years provision and supporting working parents with childcare. It would not add open-ended benefit commitments funded by even higher taxes.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will Meghan Gallacher take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Gallacher is in her final minute.

Meghan Gallacher: If the aim is to support family life, effort should go into providing families with practical support at the point at which they need it most. The Scottish Government should not be asking ridiculous questions about which benefits need to be cut; it should be giving people the tools to succeed.

Working people are paying more, services are delivering less and the Government that is responsible for this mess wants yet another parliamentary term. It does not deserve it. Scotland cannot afford a Government that spends first and thinks later. It is time to put competence before chaos, honesty before spin and taxpayers before wish lists. Scotland needs a Government that respects the people who fund it, not one that treats them as an afterthought.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Pam Duncan-Glancy, who joins us remotely.

15:26

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Social security exists to provide a safety net, but safety nets are of no use if they have holes in them. To promise a new way but not manage the forecast spend is not just unfair but a dereliction of responsibility. So, too, is marching people up a hill with promises of a kinder approach when, according to a report on ADP by Edel Harris OBE, disabled people remain frustrated about processes, inconsistent decision making and the lack of understanding of particular conditions.

My inbox reflects that reality. I have had constituents who have struggled to get information in accessible formats—they might have visual impairment or need the information in another language. We were told that the production of letters in different formats requires a manual workaround, but we should remember that we are talking about an information technology system that was millions of pounds over budget, so it is of concern that it is failing on a basic aspect of meeting needs.

Advice services in Glasgow have told me that they find the system hard to navigate. According to Citizens Advice Scotland, the fastest-growing

areas of advice on ADP relate to redeterminations and appeals. That means repeating information, and it leaves people exhausted, unheard and without hope.

According to Audit Scotland's assessment, there will be a funding gap of £2 billion by 2029-30, with the absence of a strategy to fill it. Warm words, or, as the Government's amendment says, a "commitment to ... principles", mean nothing if the Government cannot put its money where its mouth is. The Government uses warm words but does not put in the hard graft to deliver the deeds. The job of government is to do things, not just to say things.

That is why I welcome the announcement in the UK budget of the removal of the two-child limit for those on universal credit, which will lift an estimated 450,000 children across the UK out of poverty. That is the biggest projected fall in child poverty on record, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The UK Government is not just saying empty words; it is acting.

The UK Government did not, and Scottish Labour would not, stop there, because tackling the causes of poverty and boosting the means of defeating it, including through employability, housing and education, need action, too—action that the SNP Government has failed to take. The long-term solution to breaking the cycle of poverty must include supporting people into good, well-paid jobs. That means properly funding colleges to deliver skills, providing apprenticeships in key skills areas for anyone who qualifies and supporting people who desperately want to work but who face relentless discrimination or barriers to getting into work.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that the disability employment gap in Scotland still sits at 31.5 per cent. Although some disabled people are unable to work, we know that, with the right support and structures in place, many want to work and many can thrive in the workplace and contribute significantly to the economy.

The equality academy run by the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living is an incredible example of how that can be done. The organisation, which is in my region, runs an internship programme that provides NHS placements for disabled graduates. The programme supports disabled people to unlock their potential and has an 88 per cent success rate for getting people into work. We need more such programmes.

Then there are the thousands of disabled people who are left languishing on social care and NHS waiting lists, unable to access the support that they need to fulfil their potential. There are 1.7

million people in Scotland with arthritis or musculoskeletal conditions, which are among the biggest causes of persistent pain, disability and lost working days. Such people could benefit from a hip or knee replacement, for example, yet of the more than 10,000 waits of over 52 weeks for in-patient day-case treatment in Glasgow at the end of October, 15 per cent were for orthopaedics.

It is clear that there is still such a long way to go to ensure that people are able to realise their human rights, including the right to work. A Scottish Labour Government would set about removing the barriers. We would clear the waiting list backlog so that fewer people were locked out of work, revitalise colleges and reform employability.

The UK Labour Government has already delivered a direct pay rise for 200,000 of the lowest-paid Scottish workers. That is the sort of action that we need—action to deliver the rights of people to participate in society, to work and to contribute. That is how people have dignity; that is how we empower people; that is how we meet the skills gap in Scotland; and that is how we will not just reduce poverty, but consign it, rightly, to the dustbin of history.

15:31

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in today's debate, although it follows a recurrent theme from the Conservatives in terms of their increasing use of depressing, screeching rhetoric. We hear various refrains from them.

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Jamie Hepburn: I have just started. I will get on with identifying some of that screeching rhetoric.

I see that Mr Lumsden is sitting up at the back of the chamber. He is keen to constantly go on about "mega-monster pylons" or the "woke elite"—he has been watching Fox News far too often. Then there was Craig Hoy's recent dog-whistle—or perhaps foghorn—debate on illegal immigration and housing. The refrain that we heard from Mr Stewart today was about the collective "left-wing consensus"—he, too, has been watching too much Fox News. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Hepburn, could you perhaps get to the meat of your contribution?

Jamie Hepburn: I am getting to the point, Presiding Officer. The point that I am making is that today's debate is, again, designed to be just rhetoric. We heard it quite clearly from Mr Stewart. There is an attack on social security—that it is not about getting people into work. As we have heard already, we know that many of those who are in

receipt of benefits—be they reserved or devolved—are already in work, and it is dangerous and cynical to stand up in this chamber and suggest otherwise. However, that is clearly what is being done when members say that the preference should be to get people into work—we know that people in receipt of benefits are often already in employment.

Mr Stewart talks about fraud. We might take the Tories a bit more seriously if, within the past day, a report had not emerged that shows that there was £10.9 billion-worth of fraud during the period of Covid under their watch. That figure dwarfs the £5.3 billion for the Scottish Government's social security spend.

I am very proud of the Scottish Government's record in utilising its social security powers and in implementing a pension-age disability payment and the adult disability payment, which the Resolution Foundation has said

“is proving to be a more claimant-centred and dignified”

process. I am proud of the Scottish child payment, which we know is keeping young people out of poverty.

Another refrain that we often hear is about common sense—that is the rhetoric that we often hear from Mr Findlay, as if it is not common sense to invest in supporting disabled people into employment and in keeping young people out of poverty.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Jamie Hepburn: I am afraid that I am not going to give way to any Conservative members. We have been given four minutes each to speak in the debate, and I intend to use the entirety of the four minutes that I have been given.

The Tories referred to the Audit Scotland report, but they failed to mention what it cited, which is that

“87% of new ADP clients feel they have been treated with kindness”.

Of course, the cost of administering social security in Scotland is lower than was initially forecast.

I turn to affordability. It is the case that the Scottish Government has presented a balanced budget each and every year since 2007. I heard the dulcet tones of Mr Kerr earlier when that was mentioned, saying that we are “legally obliged to do so”. Of course we are legally obliged to do so.

Stephen Kerr: Yes!

Jamie Hepburn: Exactly—I do not know what point he thinks he is making. If he thinks he is making a point, it is a stupid point. The fundamental point is that the Scottish Government has balanced the budget every year, including for expenditure on social security. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members!

Jamie Hepburn: It is telling that the Conservatives say that they want to cut social security but, when they are invited to, Mr Stewart either does not have a clue what he wants to cut or, as I suspect, is not brave enough to stand up and say what he wants to cut. That is the reality of the Conservatives' position. I am proud of the Scottish Government's record, and I will continue to stand behind its investment in the people of Scotland.

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

15:35

Maggie Chapman: In case it was not clear, the Scottish Greens profoundly disagree with the premise of the Conservatives' motion. The idea that Scotland's “benefits bill” is somehow a problem to be controlled, rather than a lifeline that allows people to live dignified, independent lives, tells us everything about their priorities. Social security is a human right. It is an investment in our people, with real returns: reduced poverty, better health and the ability for people—disabled people, parents and carers—to participate fully in our society and economy.

The briefing that we received for today's debate from Scottish Action for Mental Health is clear that, for many disabled people, especially those with mental health problems, support such as ADP is not a luxury. It enables survival, independence and basic rights.

Spending on social security is rising not because Scotland is reckless but because need is rising. Westminster austerity has deepened hardship, and Scotland has chosen not to abandon people. We spend £1.3 billion more than we receive from the UK Government. That is a political choice, and it is one that I support.

If we are to be serious about tackling poverty, we must take further steps. The Scottish Government's commitment to redirect money that was previously set aside to mitigate the two-child cap into other anti-poverty measures is very welcome. That structural investment will make a tangible difference to families.

The SCP remains our flagship tool in the fight against child poverty, but we will still not meet our targets in the next five years unless that payment rises significantly. With the £150 million that is now

available, we could increase the payment by £10 a week, which would lift 20,000 additional children out of poverty. That is the scale of difference that bold action could make.

We have to confront barriers, too. The Scottish Fiscal Commission estimates that, next year, 5 per cent of eligible families—17,000 children—will miss out because they do not apply. That does not include families who are entitled to, but are not claiming, the benefits that they should have. Let us commit to doing far more to help people access what they are due, working with advice services, community organisations and trusted local partners.

We must also acknowledge that, for some families, SCP as it stands will never be enough. The Scottish Parliament information centre tells us that around a quarter of the families receiving it are so deep in poverty that £27 a week cannot move them out of it at all. While a technical premium for the most deeply impoverished families is not deliverable in the short term, we can act now by using family characteristics that correlate strongly with poverty risk.

Young people, especially young single parents, are losing out because UK benefits pay them less, purely because of their age. Some 55 per cent of children with a parent under 25 are in poverty. One Parent Families Scotland and 81 partner organisations have called for a Scottish child payment top-up for young parents, at a cost of only £20 million. That would be an excellent use of the additional funds that are now available.

Meghan Gallacher: Would Maggie Chapman give way on that point?

Maggie Chapman: I am afraid that I do not have time.

The motion before us assumes that Scottish social security spending is too high. It is not; it is too low. UK payments still sit among the lowest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Scotland is lifting them, but from a very low base. The Scottish Government must indeed plan sustainably, but if we are building new roads during a climate crisis, and if wealthy shooting estates can benefit from reliefs that are intended for small businesses, we are looking in entirely the wrong places for savings.

We should not balance the books on the backs of the poorest people. We must build a system that is rooted in dignity, equality and compassion, because that is the Scotland that people deserve.

15:39

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): In closing for Labour, I thank members across the chamber for their contributions. It is important that

we debate these matters, as it is clear that there are different views across the chamber. Liz Smith commented on that, as did other members. The debate has shown that there are fundamental differences in the way in which members believe that we should approach social security.

We should all know that social security provision is the cornerstone of a society that cares and is just. My colleague Claire Baker made that point well, as did other members in the chamber, such as Emma Roddick and Maggie Chapman. Social security is about supporting people. That support includes returning people to economic activity and making sure that there is enough work available for them. All those things matter, but the Tories do not acknowledge that it is a very unequal world out there and that people are trapped in poverty.

Liz Smith: Of course there are inequalities, but is it not the case that the way of dealing with those inequalities is to ensure that we have economic growth—

Craig Hoy: Which is undermined by the national insurance increase.

Liz Smith: Indeed—my colleague is right to say that. Economic growth will allow us to raise people up so that they each have a higher income.

Carol Mochan: We need to make things fair for people, but the current economic model is not fair. The Labour Government has increased the living wage, yet we had complaints from Conservative members about that.

We know that almost one in four children in Scotland are growing up in poverty. We need solutions to ensure that children have a fair chance to live free from hardship and with opportunities. We need a good social security system to allow children and families to have the opportunity to flourish. If we can do that for children and families, there will be a ripple effect that helps society. That is the key point—it will benefit us all. By investing in social security and children, we will make a difference for everybody in society.

That is why Scottish Labour was pleased to lodge our amendment that welcomes the removal of the two-child limit for universal credit in the 2025 budget. As other members have said, about 450,000 children across the UK will be lifted out of poverty, 95,000 of whom are estimated to be in Scotland.

There is always a debate about what we can afford to give to the very poorest in our society. We are told time and again that welfare spending is wasteful. However, what is really wasteful is having children grow up in poverty. To be clear: tackling child poverty is an investment in our society.

I have made it clear before and I make it clear once again that I deplore the previous Tory Government's attack on working-class people. The approach that was taken by the Tory Government was to benefit those who have the most wealth and power, embedding poverty in our society. That poverty is what we must tackle. The Tories on the benches opposite must accept that their party played a big part in the poverty that our constituents are experiencing today. We know that many children who live in poverty have families with at least one adult who is working, but that adult is often on low pay and in insecure work.

Labour believes that the Scottish Government must take steps to ensure that we maximise people's potential. That comes back to the point that Willie Rennie made about ensuring that there are stable paths for people to get out of poverty. By tackling structural barriers, improving pay and hours, increasing progression and supporting the realisation of workers' rights, people's outcomes can be changed.

I do not have much time left, but I will point out that the Scottish Government has a responsibility to tell us how it will do those things. We on the Labour benches believe that that will help us to address the funding gap, which the Audit Scotland report provided us information about.

15:43

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will begin with a note of consensus, particularly regarding the speeches that were made by Claire Baker and Carol Mochan, who talked about social security being an investment in our society. At the start of the debate, Claire Baker was right to push back on the way in which the Tories have framed the debate and, indeed, framed social security in general.

I welcome the scrapping of the two-child limit by the UK Government. It is long overdue, but we welcome it. However, now that we have seen the UK Government's child poverty strategy, I question the lack of ambition that is coming from Scottish Labour and UK Labour. Estimates seem to show that poverty will remain stable once those interventions have been taken, which is not the level of ambition that we need.

Claire Baker: Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, in Scotland, we are not reducing child poverty at the pace that we would want to reduce it at? Although Labour supports the Scottish child payment, the process of reducing child poverty in Scotland is pretty static. It is not moving at the pace that we want it to move at, so more action needs to be taken in Scotland, as well as across the UK.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Child poverty is forecast to fall in Scotland, as compared with the rest of the UK, and that is because of the steps that we have taken. Of course, we are in the foothills of the budget process, and if Ms Baker and her party want to make suggestions about how we can work together on this key issue, they would be more than welcome to have such discussions with me. Ms Baker is right to pose that challenge.

I hope that the Presiding Officer will forgive me for the sedentary discussion that I had earlier with Craig Hoy, but an interesting point emerged from it. Mr Hoy said—if I am incorrect, I will be happy to take an intervention from him—that he thought that we should take money away from adult disability payment, because we need to cut the benefits bill. That was an interesting revelation today, albeit that it did not come in a speech.

Craig Hoy: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am happy to find out whether Mr Hoy agrees with himself.

Craig Hoy: We want to reduce the benefits bill because, if we grow the economy, people will need fewer benefits.

Why are payments removed from only 2 per cent of recipients of adult disability payment in Scotland on review, whereas the figure for recipients of the equivalent benefit in the rest of the UK is 16 per cent?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The member is comparing apples with pears. [*Interruption.*] Well, I am sorry if I am boring Tory members with facts. The situation that Mr Hoy is referring to was to do with the reviews that took place in relation to case transfer, as opposed to the natural reviews that will happen when disability payments are assessed as part of the normal process. I point to the reassurance that the Resolution Foundation has provided on how, in general, adult disability payment is working.

It seems that the Conservatives want to cut adult disability payment. I refer them to their ex-colleague Jeremy Balfour, who rightly pointed out that ADP helps people into employment. With ADP, it is not a question of whether someone is in work or out of work—it is there to assist people with the additional cost of having a disability or a condition. That is the premise of ADP. If the Tories do not agree with that premise, they are perfectly entitled to hold a different opinion.

Liz Smith: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I gave way to Liz Smith earlier, and I gave her a fair amount of time, so I am sure that she will forgive me for not giving way this time.

Willie Rennie, as he always does, made a very thoughtful contribution, in which he put some challenges to the Scottish Government—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat, cabinet secretary. There is a conversation going on at the back of the chamber, across benches, between two members in sedentary positions. I wish that they would just stop so that we could hear the person who has the floor.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Willie Rennie said that his constituent felt believed in the devolved social security system. That is important. Dignity, fairness and respect are important.

Willie Rennie was also right to point out that economic inactivity is a challenge. We do not have time to get into that discussion today. Although the issue is linked to social security, that is not entirely the case, and it is not necessarily linked to ADP. We are looking at economic inactivity.

I refer Liz Smith and her colleagues to the Resolution Foundation report that came out on Monday, which looked at case loads and at awards. It fairly came to a conclusion that is very different from Liz Smith's. I point people to that.

Meghan Gallacher talked about wanting to spend more on childcare. The funny thing is that we have an opportunity to spend the money that the Scottish Government was due to spend on mitigating the effects of the two-child limit in a different way. The Tories chose tax cuts rather than childcare. If Meghan Gallacher wanted to do more than deliver a speech on childcare, she could have suggested that that money be provided to help people with childcare.

Meghan Gallacher: Will the cabinet secretary give way on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is about to conclude.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have heard two different narratives today, one of which has been about creating division, reversing the progress that we have made, and othering. We have also heard a different narrative—a narrative about collective investment in unapologetically tackling child poverty, giving essential assistance to carers, helping old people to heat their homes and helping disabled people with the additional costs of disability.

In a few months' time, the people of Scotland will have a choice about what kind of future they want—do they want a divisive narrative or a narrative that involves taking a principled stance to support people? I am proud of our continued investment in the people of Scotland, I am proud of what we have delivered through devolved social

security, and I am proud to take that record, and our vision for the future, to the people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I call Craig Hoy to wind up on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

15:49

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer. This has been an important debate, and one that we should not shy away from, despite attempts by our political opponents to mischaracterise our motives. It was interesting to hear Jamie Hepburn, in one of the worst speeches that I have heard since I came to the Parliament four years ago, lecture my colleague about bravery. He would not be brave enough—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Hepburn!

Craig Hoy: Mr Hepburn is only reinforcing his reputation as a thug, but we will leave that there.

The main thrust of the debate is about the spending patterns in Scotland.

Russell Findlay: I tried to intervene on the wildly blustering diatribe of Jamie Hepburn. At least, on this occasion, it was only a verbal assault on us. I also tried to intervene on the cabinet secretary, but they do not do debate over there. I wanted to ask whether the Scottish Government has any concerns whatsoever about the £2 billion social security spending gap in Scotland. I wonder whether my colleague Craig Hoy could perhaps enlighten us, as I am none the wiser—because they do not do debate.

Craig Hoy: I absolutely agree with Russell Findlay. It is simply staggering that the cabinet secretary is ignoring the fact that she has a £2 billion overspend and that, by the end of the decade, she will have a £4.7 billion budget black hole. We cannot expect working people—Scotland's taxpayers—to foot the bill. For clarity, let me say this to the minister: benefits rising to that level is not affordable, but it is also not desirable.

For too long, this has been the SNP's way: stifle growth, ramp up the benefits bill and just hope that there are enough taxpayers out there to pick up the tab. However, out there, in the real world, the people I speak to—people who have real jobs and real pressures—are working harder and getting less in their take-home pay after they pay the SNP and Labour taxes, while those living on benefits all too readily seem to get it all too easily.

Sadly, Rachel Reeves is now drinking the same Kool-Aid as the cabinet secretary, with the benefits bill in England soaring at the very time that growth forecasts are being cut and taxes for businesses

and workers are soaring. The point of no return has not yet been reached, but both our Governments need to act now and act urgently to prevent public finances spiralling out of control.

The people whose doors I knock on often tell me that they resent working so hard, feeling that they are forgotten about, in order to pay for this Government's misguided priorities. They do not resent paying taxes, but they point across the street to the family on benefits, who have just returned from a foreign holiday, when they themselves cannot afford a night out. They resent that not enough is being done to get people off benefits and back to work, creating a dependency culture that I suspect is being created for crude political purposes. Getting up, going to work—*[Interruption.]*—having a—*[Interruption.]* The minister keeps chuntering away. If she wants to intervene, she is very welcome to.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am genuinely flabbergasted at the Tories' continuous attempts to other people. One week it is immigrants, the next week it is poor people, and then it is disabled people—I wonder who it will be next week. There is one thing that is guaranteed: the doors he is chapping on are not voting Tory next time round, are they?

Craig Hoy: Reflecting the very real concerns of the people whose doors I have knocked on in Dumfries is not othering people; it is simply telling the minister what is happening out there in the real world. I am talking about people who do not have chauffeurs to ferry them from meeting to meeting.

Carol Mochan: Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: I do not have time.

Before the Government says that some benefits support people getting into work, let me say that we accept that point—Liz Smith has accepted that—but much more data needs to be collected on the impact of benefits on people's working patterns and on the number of people on adult disability payment who are actually also in work. The Government does not have that data, and it is not going to look for that data.

The £5.4 billion that is spent on adult disability payment alone is unsustainable. I am very sympathetic to some of Jeremy Balfour's points but, ultimately, we must seek a methodology to reduce the number of people who are dependent on that benefit. If that means giving them the skills they need and more support to get into full-time work, that is what the Government should be doing, rather than cutting the skills and colleges budget.

Ultimately, as a country, we have to live within our means. For example, the introduction of the

two-child benefit cap has saved taxpayers millions of pounds. Our benefits system should be there to provide a safety net—a hand up, not a handout. However, by Labour's own admission, removing the two-child benefit cap will cost £2 billion next year, rising to £3 billion by the end of the decade. Again, that will have to be paid for by taxes from hard-working Britons.

Carol Mochan: Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: I will not, unless I can have the time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is very limited time.

Craig Hoy: I will take a very brief intervention.

Carol Mochan: I want to speak about the way in which we approach this issue. We cannot accuse people. I knock on doors every day, and the reality is that many people understand that people who require social security are in need. If we want to make things fairer, we need to look at the way in which the economic model runs in this country.

Craig Hoy: I was rather hoping that Carol Mochan would say why Keir Starmer, having said during the election campaign that he would try to bring down the benefits bill, has run away at the first sign of gunfire from the Labour left.

Ultimately, we have to be on the side of those people who put more into the system than they take out. If someone has worked hard during their lifetime, saved, paid their taxes and done the right thing, they deserve dignity and a decent standard of living when they retire. I am on the side of people who work hard, want to get on in life through their own efforts and want to leave something behind for their children and grandchildren.

I also want to make sure that people in genuine hardship get the help that they need. However, we are in favour of a hand up, never just a handout. That is why we must have a welfare system in Scotland that encourages and incentivises work and self-reliance, not a life on benefits for some that is paid for by everybody else.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on controlling the rising benefits bill in Scotland. There will be a short pause before we move to the next item of business.

Jeremy Balfour: On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. I intervened a couple of times on ADP. I should have declared that I am on higher-rate ADP and, happily, am in employment as well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Balfour. That is now on the record.

Road Network (Connectivity and Economic Growth)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-20057, in the name of Sue Webber, on connecting Scotland. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:57

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): *[Interruption.]* Sorry—I am phoning someone by mistake.

Scotland's road network is the backbone of our connectivity and economic growth. Communities across Scotland, from the Borders to the Highlands, rely on safe, efficient and modern roads to access jobs, education, healthcare and life opportunities, yet Scotland's roads have been neglected by the Scottish National Party. Dangerous and deteriorating roads are costing lives, damaging local economies and leaving motorists stuck with long, unsafe journeys on roads that should have been fixed years ago.

Motorists are essential to Scotland's economy and crucial for our connectivity, but they are being punished by the SNP Government. Too often, promises are made and not delivered. The SNP will dual the A9 10 years late at the very earliest. It has failed to dual any of the A96, despite promising to do so in 2011. The SNP has also spent £30 million on the Inverness to Nairn upgrade despite no construction having begun. If we are serious about unlocking Scotland's potential, the SNP Government must accelerate the upgrading of key roads such as the A75, the A77 and the A96, and it must finally deliver on its commitment to dual the A9, without rejecting the private investment that could help to make that happen.

The state of key roads across Scotland is a national disgrace, and the SNP's incompetence is continuing to cost lives. SNP ministers have sat on their hands while roads have fallen into a state of total disrepair, despite repeated promises to dual roads such as the A9 and the A96. It is unacceptable that motorists are being treated with contempt by an SNP Government that, shamefully, keeps kicking the can down the road.

We are the only party at Holyrood to have proposed bold action to tackle this issue. We would pass an emergency law at Holyrood that would set out a special fast-track process for completing the A9 dualling project. We would also pass an emergency law that would see key sections of the A75 dualled by 2031 and the entire road dualled as quickly as possible thereafter.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I hear what the member is saying, and I totally accept the need for urgency, but it is not about passing laws; it is about planning and implementation. What does the member propose to do to help us get us better at planning and building roads, not only passing laws?

Sue Webber: No one objects to the plans for the A9. Everyone is desperate for that road to be dualled—yet here we are.

Improved connectivity is not only about tarmac and lanes; it is about ensuring that those who use our roads—particularly those in the logistics sector, which I will focus on—have the infrastructure that they need to operate safely and efficiently.

Scotland's haulage industry is vital to our economy. The logistics sector contributes £170 billion to the United Kingdom's economy each year, and it is one of the UK's largest employers, with more than 200,000 people employed in logistics roles in Scotland. However, its contribution to growth and the economy is unfortunately not always recognised, and drivers' health, safety and wellbeing are not prioritised.

Scotland faces a shortage of safe, high-quality, secure and well-equipped rest stops for trucks, particularly in the Highlands and rural areas, which, although geographically remote, play a vital role in the logistics and supply chain network. The lack of secure and well-equipped facilities has serious consequences, including the fact that some of our heavy goods vehicle drivers are being forced to park in unsuitable or unsafe locations or to take long detours to find suitable facilities because they have to stop to rest—that is the law. Driver health and wellbeing suffer due to poor access to clean, safe hygiene facilities, healthy food and rest areas. The rate of freight crime is also rising, with lorries and cargo increasingly being targeted by organised criminals due to the absence of secure parking.

By investing in safe facilities along our major routes, we can support the wellbeing of drivers, improve road safety and strengthen the supply chains that keep Scotland moving. That practical step would make a real difference to businesses and communities alike, and it is long overdue. I was about to say that it is common sense, but Jamie Hepburn is no longer in the chamber.

Finally, we must look to the future. The UK Labour Government's proposal for a pay-per-mile tax on electric and hybrid vehicles is of concern to me, because it risks undermining the transition to cleaner transport and penalising families and businesses who are trying to do the right thing. Labour has got that really wrong. I am glad to see

in the Scottish National Party amendment that the cabinet secretary shares our concern about that.

Before I discuss how Labour's plans to introduce a 3p per mile fee on EVs will cripple rural EV drivers even further, I will consider those who have taken that leap of faith with the public charging network in the state that it is currently in. I would like Scottish ministers to focus on future proofing our EV charging network and ensuring that drivers can travel across Scotland with confidence. A charging infrastructure must be put in place if more people are to start using EVs. The current infrastructure is patchy and unreliable, and it fails to keep pace with demand.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): Will the member give way?

Sue Webber: If Ms Hyslop does not mind, I have quite a bit to say. If I have time, I will bring her in.

Motorists cannot be expected to make the shift to EVs without having confidence that charging will be accessible, affordable and convenient. I am an EV user and I had charging anxiety, which was the biggest barrier to my making the decision to get the car. That is still the case for so many people, especially those who do not have home charging and who rely on the public charging network.

Those who charge at public charge points have no idea what they are going to be charged per kilowatt, because it is dependent on so many things, including the speed of the charger and who owns the charger. That is if they can even find the rate of the kilowatt listed somewhere in the small print when they are sent to a website. They might not have a network signal to connect to the internet. They also will not know whether the charger even works. EV charging is a lottery, and we all know that those who play the lottery rarely come out on top. Reliable charging points along key roads will encourage the uptake of electric vehicles.

For far too long, our economy has suffered because the road network is not up to the standard that our cities and key routes need. The A9 to Inverness remains a killer because of the long single carriageway stretches, and dualling is decades behind schedule. I want the upgrade of the A77 and A75 to Stranraer to be put front and centre.

Road upgrades are not a luxury—they are central to our economic and social development. I want Scotland to thrive, and I think that we must put connectivity at the heart of our priorities. Although I am pleased that the SNP shares my concerns about EV issues and agrees that the roads need to be upgraded and maintained, I do not get the sense that it understands the urgency

for that, or that our communities are crying out for help right now.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of Scotland's road network to delivering enhanced connectivity and economic growth across Scotland; urges the Scottish Government to accelerate the upgrading and dualling of key roads such as the A75, A77 and A96, and to adhere to its promise to dual the A9 by 2035 or earlier and to ensure that this project is finally completed by not rejecting private funding; believes that improved connections across Scotland can be enhanced through the provision of more safe and secure rest stops, particularly for the logistics sector; rejects the UK Labour administration's planned imposition of a pay-per-mile tax for electric and hybrid vehicles, and urges the Scottish Ministers to undertake greater efforts to futureproof the EV charging network across Scotland's key roads, and urges the Scottish Government to commit to ensuring that the upgrading of Scotland's roads remains central to future economic and social development.

16:05

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): This Government has made significant investment to improve Scotland's trunk road network and has a strong record of delivering road infrastructure projects. We also have a record level of funding in our trunk road maintenance budget, to ensure that our trunk roads are in a proper state of repair and to mitigate the impacts of climate change and wetter weather. This SNP Government delivered the new £1.34 billion Queensferry crossing, and, through the use of private finance, we have also delivered the Aberdeen western peripheral route, the Balmedie to Tippetty road and the M8, M73 and M74 motorway improvement schemes, which are delivering tangible benefits to lives across the country daily.

We have also completed five major improvements on the A77, totalling £64 million, and six on the A75, with a total value of more than £50 million, further enhancing connectivity and improving road safety.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: No.

Other recently completed projects include the Haudagain improvement in Aberdeen, the A737 Dalry bypass and the first two sections of the A9 dualling programme, Kincaig to Dalraddy and Luncarty to Pass of Birnam. Despite facing significant demands on our capital budget—remember, the previous UK Conservative Government stripped £6 billion out of our budget—we continue to invest in further upgrades to our road infrastructure. Since announcing our delivery plan to dual the A9 between—

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I have only five minutes, and I have a lot of ground to cover, because we are doing so much.

Since announcing in December 2023 our delivery plan to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness, we have met every milestone on time. Today, work is under way on the third section, Tomatin to Moy, in the north and on the fourth section, Tay crossing to Ballinluig, in the south. The procurement of the fifth section, Pitlochry to Killiecrankie, is well under way.

I wrote to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on 26 November to confirm that procurement and funding routes for the remaining A9 projects will be announced as part of the budget and spending review on 13 January 2026, as any decision will have a significant impact on that and on future spending reviews and budgets. I have requested to make a parliamentary statement on the progress of the A9 dualling programme following that announcement, to provide further detail on the outcomes of the further decision-making process.

Let me be clear that we remain fully committed to delivering the full A9 dualling programme by 2035. Already, 10 out of the 11 sections of the A9 have completed the statutory process. If the Conservatives want to shorten the process of the final remaining section, from Pass of Birnam to the Tay crossing, Murdo Fraser will need to write to each and every one of the objectors to say that the Conservatives want to remove that right to object, ignore them and steam on regardless—good luck with that one.

We also remain in favour of full dualling of the A96 and are progressing the dualling process from Inverness to Nairn. We are pressing forward with work to determine the most suitable procurement option for delivering the scheme, as well as the adjacent Inshes to Smithton link road.

I had constructive discussions, as reported by the *Ayr Advertiser*, on 2 November this year with the A77 campaign group, and separately with the south-west transport alliance and the A75 campaign group. We have a firm plan for the improvements that we want to make on both routes, as is set out in the strategic transport projects review 2, and those are now progressing. The union connectivity review made it clear that the majority of the strategic benefits of improvements to the A75 are to the rest of the UK and recommended that the UK Government support the significant upgrade to the route. Given that, I will continue to press the new UK

Government to provide additional funding for improvements to the A75.

Briefly, on EV charges, I am not sure whether Sue Webber is aware that the UK Government is responsible for the standards for the public charging network. Indeed, it introduced regulations on the matter in December last year.

The Scottish Government has worked collaboratively to support the introduction of the vehicle emissions trading scheme with the UK Government. It is four-nations legislation with annual targets that chart a path towards battery electric vehicle uptake, and it remains the most significant tool that we have to reduce road transport emissions.

We are committed to maintaining the strength and integrity of VETS, and it is clear that any weakening of that will risk slowing progress towards our carbon budgets. If we are to have a sensible transition to EV car use, the UK Government needs to engage the four nations properly on reform of motor taxation, as I have regularly asked of previous Conservative and current UK Government ministers.

In conclusion, despite facing significant demands on our capital budget, this Government has delivered, and will continue to deliver, infrastructure improvements to enhance connectivity, decarbonise road transport and promote sustainable economic growth for the people of Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-20057.3, to leave out from “; urges” to end and insert:

“and the progress being made to deliver the completion of the A9 dualling in 2035 specifically; further recognises that both public and private funding has been used to support the development of the trunk road network, including the use of private finance for the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route/Balmedie-Tipperty and the M8, M74 and M73 motorway improvements, and that private finance will continue to play a role in the future; notes that the Union Connectivity Review, undertaken by Lord Peter Hendy on behalf of the previous UK Conservative administration, recognised the contribution that the A75 makes in linking the rest of the UK to Northern Ireland; urges the UK Government to match the previous UK Conservative administration’s funding commitment for the A75; notes the improvements undertaken by the Scottish Government to the A77, including the Maybole Bypass; welcomes the ongoing constructive work between the Scottish Government and the A77 Campaign Group and South West Transport Alliance; supports the full dualling of the A96, beginning with the Inverness to Nairn section, along with delivery of the Inshes to Smithton Link Road, as part of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal; agrees that improved connections across Scotland can be enhanced through the provision of more safe and secure rest stops, particularly for the logistics sector; rejects the UK Government’s planned imposition of a pay-per-mile tax for electric and hybrid vehicles, regretting the ill-thought-out and counter-productive proposal, which will be bad for the climate and for rural Scotland in particular; agrees that the switch to EV cars and the provision of public and at-home

EV infrastructure will be vital to Scotland meeting its climate change targets, and calls on the UK Government to engage in four nations discussions on motoring taxation reform to support a properly planned transition to EV car use."

16:10

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to open for Labour in the debate, given that I have acquired transport as part of my economy, business and fair work brief. I think that that is a good thing, because transport properly belongs in the economy brief.

I always try to be collegiate in debates, and there are many things in the motion and all the amendments with which Labour can agree, but the most important is the idea that transport and the roads network are about connecting Scotland. Although there are things in the Conservative motion with which I disagree, the fundamental point about connectivity is clear.

That point was brought home to me when I visited Fort William last summer. Many interesting things were brought to my attention during my visit, but this was the most important. Around 50 per cent of all Scotland's salmon comes through Fort William. It then needs to be transported along the A82, on which, for large stretches, heavy goods vehicles have to have their wheels literally on the white line, and there is no space for two HGVs to pass each other along the way. Salmon is Scotland's third biggest export, and it is going down a road that cannot have two HGVs passing each other—that is important. We need to understand that the issue of roads is not about choice or consumer decision—it is about how our economy connects up.

Another important facet of the motion—which I agree with, but which Labour cannot support; I will come to that later—is that it is about the detail. I am pleased that the motion refers to "rest stops", because that highlights some of what we need to get right. Yes, we need to build roads, but we also need to ensure that our roads are wide enough and have rest stops so that HGV drivers have secure places in which to park up. Ultimately, if we want goods to move from point A to point B around the country, we need those things.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: I am happy to give way, but it will have to be brief.

Douglas Ross: Daniel Johnson mentioned rest stops. There is a rest stop on the A9 that provides a useful food van, but Transport Scotland will not allow a sign to be put up to tell drivers to go in there. Does he believe that that should be looked at? It would help drivers to get the rest that they

need, and food and drink to keep them alert while driving.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Mr Johnson.

Daniel Johnson: On the face of it, the member's suggestion sounds eminently sensible. It is about getting into the small details, which can make a big difference. If we want our roads to work in order to move goods around, HGV drivers need good facilities, including food outlets and secure places to sleep. That is fundamental.

Whisky is another of Scotland's main exports. There are 99 distilleries in the Highlands, and 80 per cent of Highland gross domestic product is reliant on whisky. That generates 1,500 HGV journeys per day; there are sections of the A96 on which a fifth of all traffic is due to whisky.

We export 40 bottles of whisky per second from Scotland. When we look at the challenges that we face with roads such as the A96, or indeed the A9, we see that when we have traffic jams there, we are literally creating the mother of all bottlenecks for our second-biggest export industry.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: It will have to be very brief. *[Interruption.]* Actually, I do not really have time.

I come on to EV—

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: I am afraid that I cannot.

I say politely to members of both parties that oppose the EV tax that, while the objections are understandable, we have taxation right now that is based on use. There is a charge of more than 50p on every litre of fuel; given that the average car does about 12 to 18 miles per litre, that is about 3p per mile. Given that—I presume—neither of those parties is opposed to fuel duty, how do they propose to replace the £20 billion? I simply put that to them. I understand the objections, but what is the replacement for that revenue?

On that, I will close, because I have run out of time.

I move amendment S6M-20057.1, to leave out from " ; rejects" to end and insert:

" , and considers that future transport infrastructure decisions should be based on economic importance, safety and local necessity, and underpinned by a national industrial strategy and a strategic spatial plan."

16:14

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Speaking as a motorist, I welcome

sensible investment in our roads, but building roads is not the only way to generate economic growth, and roads are not even the most effective transport infrastructure to achieve that goal. The evidence on the economic impact of road building is mixed. Analysis from the Institute for Public Policy Research shows that investing in roads does not deliver good value for money. Return on investment for road infrastructure is lower compared with other infrastructure investments, particularly in public transport. In a recent SWestrans board meeting, Transport Scotland officials noted that revenue spending on the A75 in the past two years would keep bus services in Dumfries and Galloway running for the next 300 years.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: Unfortunately, I do not think that I have time to take interventions.

Of course, buses use the roads too, but the unprecedented growth in traffic and congestion is piling costs on to maintaining the network for all road users, and public transport is not being prioritised as was promised in the national transport strategy.

The notion that upgrading and dualling more roads in Scotland is the best way to boost economic growth and increase connectivity is disingenuous. Investment in our roads for maintenance, improved safety and climate resilience is absolutely necessary, but dualling miles of road to speed up journey times by a handful of minutes is not.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Mark Ruskell: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you some time back.

Finlay Carson: Briefly, the economic impact assessment for the A75 noted that full dualling would generate £5 billion-worth of benefits, including £700 million from reduced journey times and—I note for Mark Ruskell—£95 million in carbon dioxide emission savings.

Mark Ruskell: Every project needs to be considered on its own merits. If the member were to look at the A9, he would see that its cost benefit ratio did not stack up initially. I am asking for all transport infrastructure projects to be considered fairly against each other as to whether they are delivering the best value for the public pound. Numerous studies have shown that investing in public buses and trains connects people with economic and education opportunities, boosts

productivity and aids connectivity, which all contributes towards growth.

There are also clear environmental and health benefits of investing in and encouraging a shift towards sustainable transport. We all know that private car use is responsible for about 60 per cent of road transport emissions, compared with the 6 per cent of emissions that are created by public transport.

Obviously, we have a lot of roads in Scotland—31,700 miles of roads, to be exact, which is enough to travel the circumference of the earth one and a half times. If we compare that with the 1,752 miles of Scotland's railway network, it is clear that upgrading and dualling the A75, the A7, the A96 and the A9 will not enhance connectivity.

I absolutely accept that we need investment to dual key sections of trunk roads, alongside junction improvements and bypasses to relieve town centres of traffic congestion. However, we do not need investment to build wider roads everywhere that will ultimately result in more traffic congestion and higher maintenance costs.

We need investment in accessible, affordable and reliable public transport. That means upgrading the Highland main line, for example, and delivering projects such as Newburgh station to connect communities to the rail network and create fresh economic opportunities. It means investing in bus services so that they are reliable, affordable services that everyone can access, which is especially important in rural communities, where those who depend on public transport can become socially isolated. Bus priority measures should be delivered in our cities, so that buses can quickly pass traffic jams. The pause in the Government's funding for those investments was damaging. Delays and congestion have only helped to accelerate the withdrawal of services by private operators that are solely focused on profitability.

In conclusion, we need a Government that is prepared to break the cycle of declining bus services and commit to financially supporting public transport to deliver franchising and public control for bus services, alongside investment in rail and active travel. I look forward to a national transport strategy that goes back to the principles of good transport planning, rather than a slanging match about the dualling of roads in Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-20057.2, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"believes that future transport investment must prioritise sustainability, equality, public transport and active travel over large-scale road building, and further believes that investment in roads should improve safety, address maintenance backlogs, deliver climate resilience on vulnerable routes, including the A83, help prioritise road space for buses and be matched with ambitious investment

in rail, including upgrading the Highland Mainline and reconnecting communities, such as Newburgh, to the rail network.”

16:19

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): The Scottish Government’s 2015 infrastructure investment plan has been laid bare not just in the debate but numerous times in the chamber. The investment plan promised, among other things, two new major ferries, which would be operational by 2017 at a price of £90 million for both. It promised to invest in our harbours, yet Ardrossan harbour is still in limbo, and all the businesses around it are still waiting for compensation for the endless disruption. There is also the famous promise—the Conservatives are right to bring it to the fore today—that was a

“commitment to ... dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025”.

What has happened since 2015? The sad reality is that 48 people have died on that single road alone. The worst year on record was 2022, when 13 people lost their lives. I say gently to the Government that, no matter what the logistical or financial barriers are to finishing that road, surely there is a moral imperative, if nothing else, to get it done.

The road should have been dualled before now. If that can be done before 2035, that is even better. However, the problem that remains is: how many more people will die while we wait for the road to be completed?

The issue is not just with the A9. Let us look at the A96. Moray Council and the local chamber of commerce recently said that major developments such as ScotWind and the Inverness and Cromarty Firth green port are being held back by a failure to complete the dualling of that road.

Similarly, as others have mentioned, completing the dualling of the A77 and the A75 would massively improve not just the local economy but links between Scotland and Northern Ireland. That would keep heavy trucks off single-lane roads, improve road safety and, as Finlay Carson said, reduce carbon output in that part of the world.

Presiding Officer, do not get me started on the M8, where I seem to spend most of my free time these days. It is Scotland’s busiest road, with 150,000 people using it every day. It connects our largest city with our capital city. However, the road is now the contraflow capital of Scotland. Glasgow airport is left connected to Glasgow city solely by a road that resembles a car park at most times of the day.

What does that result in? CBI Scotland was quite clear with us. It said:

“Scotland’s motorways are the beating heart of our economy ... But motorway construction has slowed in recent years in a way that just doesn’t fit with our ambition for long-term, sustainable economic growth.”

I am sorry, but I have to disagree with Mr Johnson on EV cars. We all know that they are the future—they have a lower carbon footprint, they represent a step towards net zero and they will mean cleaner air for our children and less reliance on fossil fuels. However, the new policy to tax people who have bought an EV is utterly insane. It will hit rural economies harder than those anywhere else and will surely drive down uptake, not improve it.

I understand the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s conundrum in replacing fuel duty with some other source of income, but the proposed policy solution smells like a policy that has been drummed up in Whitehall by somebody who gets on the tube every day to work, not by somebody who has to make a 200-mile journey to the nearest maternity hospital. That is the reality of what happens when such policies are not thoroughly thought through. Do not forget that our EV industry is up against it. It is up against China and others, so why are we handing advantage to them on a plate?

Here is what we could be doing. We could be building better EV infrastructure. Why not offer sensible subsidies to move from gas to electric? Why not even cap the cost of charging EVs? It is not the consumers who need to change their behaviour—I am afraid that, in this case, it is Government ministers.

I will support the essence of the Conservative motion, because the EV tax is a step backwards, it is punitive and it is short-sighted. We need to dual the A9 and get on with it, and we need to unlock our regional and rural economies by building up and building better. I believe that no one and nowhere should be left behind. Both of Scotland’s Governments share responsibility for keeping our country moving.

16:23

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have been travelling along the A9 for more than 50 years. I just about remember the days when my family would drive on winding country roads, through the main streets of small towns and villages, as we rushed to catch a ferry across the Beauly Firth to North Kessock and headed up to catch another ferry at Scrabster. Although it took hours to get anywhere in those days, real improvements were then made, with new bridges, dualling and upgrades along the length of that road, largely because of the actions of a Conservative UK Government.

However, that progress stalled under devolution. I am sorry that Daniel Johnson could not take my intervention, because I would have highlighted that, in the eight years of the Labour-Lib Dem Scottish Executive, it failed to dual even one mile of the A9 between Inverness and Perth. That failure was one of the reasons why, almost 20 years ago—it feels longer now—Murdo Fraser and I launched the Scottish Conservatives' campaign to dual the A9. We recognised that, for economic, social and safety reasons, the A9, which served as the backbone of Scotland and was an arterial route like no other, needed dualling between Inverness and Perth.

The motion makes the economic case for connectivity, and there can be few more powerful mechanisms for creating wealth and driving improvements in living standards. However, with the A9 in particular, we must remember the other considerations. In 2007, the SNP said that it accepted the case that dualling the A9 would save lives. It is one thing to fail to live up to the promise of dualling when we can count the cost in terms of pounds and pence, but it is quite another when we can count the cost in the number of lives lost and families left mourning the loss of loved ones.

Too many people have died on that road, especially in the past decade. In 2022 alone, there were 12 fatalities on the single-carriageway stretches. I hope that that statistic silences those who think that piecemeal upgrades have been sufficient. Every regular user of the road knows that that is not the case. Although we will never make every road in Scotland entirely safe, dualling the A9 would make a massive difference. The SNP promised to do that, but it has not.

The issue is, of course, far broader than one road. Commitments to dualling the A96, which is another important road in my region, are equally neglected by the Scottish Government. I note that the Government amendment includes the term “dualling” in relation to that road. Now that the Government has finally accepted that it failed to do that as promised, it is at least some encouragement that it has started using the term “dualling” rather than the mealy-mouthed terms “improvement” and “upgrade” that it has been using for the past few years.

The A9, however, is totemic of the Government's failure, not just in relation to keeping its promises but in relation to the neglect of whole areas of Scotland. I hope that we all want the Highlands and Islands, and other remote and rural communities across Scotland, to succeed and prosper, but that will not happen while infrastructure investment remains a reluctant affair that is dragged out in time and cost and, ironically, is subject to both too much consultation and too little attention to local needs.

As covered in our motion, I reiterate my opposition to the UK Labour Government's planned imposition of a pay-per-mile tax for electric and hybrid vehicles. Although I want those new technologies to make their contribution to supporting our roads network, such a move is likely to be the thin end of the wedge, which, if successful, would lead to a pay-per-mile tax being rolled out for all vehicles. That would hammer communities in rural areas, where we need our cars just to get about.

Although I have focused on some of the main routes in my region, I also want to highlight a common frustration for my constituents about the state of their local roads, particularly in the Highland Council area. I have been forced to advocate on behalf of constituents who have literally been left stuck in their homes because of the state of local roads, including dangerous potholes that have left the roads unusable for all but those who drive four-by-fours.

I recognise that Government procurement is not straightforward, but the SNP has presided over a system in which progress has slowed almost to a standstill. Meanwhile, our road network continues to be a barrier to development and, in cases such as the A9, people continue to lose their lives. The Scottish Conservatives are seeking to make a difference. Will the Scottish Government move on from acknowledging its failings and actually do something to fix them? Will it stop the excuses, stop the delays and get the A9 dualled?

16:27

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am pleased to see the focus in the Government's amendment on the dualling of the A9 and its completion in 2035, and on the dualling of the A96, particularly the Inverness to Nairn section, which includes the Nairn bypass. The traffic congestion in the middle of Nairn—where folk travelling to Aberdeen or further afield get frustrated as they travel through the 20mph zone, often idling for long periods at far below 20mph and polluting the town centre—is unnecessary and unhelpful to the amenity of the town.

When travelling through that section, people go past a primary school and key pedestrian routes to the railway station, shops and community centre. I feel out of place in my car there, but it is simply unavoidable for many when travelling by train is not suitable. That is one of the least pleasant journeys that I take regularly, but it is a necessary one for ambulances, carers travelling between towns, and many heavy goods vehicles. The Nairn bypass is the most needed infrastructure investment in Inverness and Nairn. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that that is reflected in my correspondence with her.

Similarly, the Inshes to Smithton link road has the potential to remove traffic from key pressure areas as well as improve active travel links. Having cycled the A96 to Burger King a fair bit when I was a Deliveroo rider, I can tell Parliament that that will be warmly welcomed by many commuters and other cyclists in the city.

The Longman junction improvement project was initially to be addressed alongside the new link road as part of the Inverness and Highland city region deal, but it was removed at Highland Council's request in order to prioritise a replacement for the Corran ferry. Necessary as I know that ferry link to be, I am interested in whether the cabinet secretary can provide any information on the Longman junction's current position in what I know is a very long list of priorities, and on how the procurement strategy work has gone.

I often struggle—I know that the cabinet secretary's officials do, too—to reassure constituents that something is on-going in relation to a project, even though they cannot see spades in the ground or plant and road works signs with their own eyes. Works are progressing at a fantastic rate at the Tomatin to Moy section of the A9 thanks to the Balfour Beatty team on site, but that very much contrasts with the situation with the Nairn bypass.

I respect the necessity of works on the whole of the A96, which will be important for the north-east, but our most urgent focus must be on the Inverness to Nairn section and the Nairn bypass. It is the most advanced project in the wider review and is desperately needed for so many reasons. We expect housing and other infrastructure to be coming into the area quickly, particularly given the nearby freeport. However, for many, the announcements add to their anxiety about the current situation with the road and whether it will worsen. While they wait for visible works to begin, many of my constituents are keen to hear the cabinet secretary provide the earliest possible timeline for the construction of the bypass and any other reassurances that can be provided at this point.

We cannot let the momentum on the Nairn bypass be lost or delayed. Tangible progress on it is the best way that the Parliament can deliver for the people of Nairn and ensure that future house building, employment opportunities and any other infrastructure projects do not have negative consequences for the town.

16:31

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): For too long, my constituents have been told to wait—to wait for studies, to wait for the

second strategic transport projects review, to wait for consultations and to wait for future budgets. Now, in the SNP's amendment, it is effectively being suggested that we should wait for the UK Government. It is conveniently forgotten that transport is a devolved responsibility. Although I agree that the UK Government should shoulder some responsibility, it is the Scottish Government that needs to take the lead.

While we wait, the backbone of Dumfries and Galloway, the most important gateway for United Kingdom island trade, remains a narrow single-carriageway bottleneck that is infamously known as the goat track. Let me be clear: the lack of investment is a political choice, and that choice costs economically, environmentally and in terms of human lives.

Each day, the A75 carries around 15,000 vehicles, 16 per cent of which are HGVs, and each year they transport more than £6 billion-worth of goods. It is the lifeblood of trade through Cairnryan, yet that vital route remains the only single-carriageway section of the Euroroute from Northern Ireland to St Petersburg. Hauliers lose hours while vehicles are stuck behind slow traffic and are forced to risk overtaking. Local businesses, manufacturers, food producers and tourist operators see their competitiveness eroded by unreliable journey times. Over the next few evenings, we will once again see full closures of the road, which will require vehicles to detour almost 100 miles and take up to two and a half hours on routes that are far from safe or fit for purpose for HGVs.

The A75 is too narrow to allow normal traffic management of the type that we would see anywhere else in the country. Its safety record over the past decade is sobering: 19 fatalities, 88 serious injuries and nearly 300 injuries. It is a record of families shattered and lives changed for ever.

Dualling the A75 is not a luxury; it is a safety and productivity intervention. It would mean faster, safer freight transport, reliable supply chains and a fighting chance for inward investment and job creation in the south-west. The Dumfries and Galloway economic impact report, which was commissioned by councils in Scotland and Northern Ireland, estimates that dualling the A75 and improving the A77 would generate £5 billion of benefits to the UK economy, including £700 million in reduced journey times and operating costs and £95 million in CO₂ savings. Expanding the road would support our climate goals.

Mark Ruskell: Finlay Carson has made a strong case for dualling the A75, but the cost of that would be £50 million and Governments need to prioritise investment. The cost of dualling the A96 would be up to £5 billion—that is £5,000

million. Does he not see that the political priorities are for the A96, not the projects that he has put forward?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Mr Carson.

Finlay Carson: I completely dispute what Mark Ruskell has said.

The campaign groups are clear. SWestrans says that every delay costs Scotland's economy. We need shovels in the ground, not another decade of studies. Local businesses echo that frustration. One haulier told me:

"We lose thousands every year because of delays on the A75."

The situation is not only an inconvenience; it is a barrier to growth.

For well over a decade, I have championed the cause of dualling the A75 by raising it in the chamber, pressing ministers, convening round tables and working with campaign groups. I have demanded feasibility studies, pushed for bypass plans and argued for joint Scottish Government and UK Government funding to reflect the route's strategic importance. However, warm words and endless reviews do not move shovels. My constituents deserve delivery, not delays.

That is not just my view; it is rural Scotland's view. The report "Scotland's Rural Voice", which was published yesterday, found that 80 per cent of respondents believe that infrastructure investment is simply not good enough, with eight in 10 rural Scots feeling let down by the lack of commitment to roads and connectivity. That statistic should ring alarm bells. Neglect is real and widespread.

This exhausted SNP Government must stop ignoring the south-west, take accountability and fix the A75. We need a binding timetable, not dusty reports—a published programme with dates for route selection, statutory orders, procurement and phased construction. We also need tangible and transparent co-funding, because we are talking about a UK-wide corridor. We cannot afford to dither. Businesses pay a premium in delays, families suffer from accidents and Scotland loses out on investment, with freight shifting from Cairnryan to Holyhead and Heysham.

Some might balk at the cost, but they miss the truth that inaction is more expensive. Smart infrastructure delivers investment in safety, growth and sustainability. This is a test of serious government and of Scotland's commitment to balance growth, climate integrity and citizen safety. If the Government means what it says, the dualling of the A75 would not be discretionary—it is overdue. My constituents ask for a fair share of Scotland's ambition. Dualling the A75 would send a simple but powerful message that the south-

west matters, that connectivity matters and that climate change and economic leadership can go hand in hand. It is time to act.

16:36

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): This debate provides an opportunity to focus on the lack of progress that the SNP Government has delivered in improving and maintaining transport infrastructure across Scotland. The cabinet secretary was keen to talk about progress on the A9. I have to say that, for those who travel on it, it does not feel as though progress has been made.

Transport is vital—members from across the chamber agree on that—and we need a joined-up approach, with better infrastructure, investment, repairs and maintenance.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Will Sarah Boyack take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No—I do not have time.

Scottish Labour's focus is on upgrading our creaking transport infrastructure. It is vital that our roads—our national and our local road networks—are maintained. We must also factor in connectivity between our rail infrastructure and bus services, because action is needed in that regard, too. Far too many communities simply do not have the access that they need.

As we say in our amendment, we need a national industrial strategy that aligns transport, energy and skills with long-term economic growth, as well as a strategic spatial plan. We need investment across the regions and, as members have said, we must strengthen logistics and our rail links to deliver our climate and nature emergency commitments. Our transport sector is vital. If we lag behind because we do not invest in roads, rail and logistics, there will be an impact on sustainable growth and the transport of goods.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Will Sarah Boyack take an intervention on that point?

Sarah Boyack: I will not, because I am now nearly a third of the way through my time. *[Interruption.]* I have said no twice.

Without reliable roads and better connectivity, businesses cannot compete and communities cannot thrive. When transport networks fail, supply chains break, and the first to suffer are our local shops, our rural communities and the most vulnerable households.

We will see more and more challenges as a result of infrastructure being impacted by the climate and nature emergency, so we need better logistics and transport planning to protect our economy and our environment.

Every road, rail link, port and ferry link must be linked together as part of a logistics chain. Finlay Carson's points about Cairnryan were absolutely right, and he highlighted the failure to make joined-up connections. Having a stronger logistics network means that farmers can get food to market, businesses can reach customers and Scotland can compete globally.

Several colleagues have mentioned safety issues. The quality and safety of our roads and pavements is crucial. Having safer roads and infrastructure is not optional; it is vital to people's health, as has been highlighted. Without better and safer roads, we risk discouraging people—people will not be able to choose active travel, and cycling is not appealing, if there are potholes, poor surfaces and unsafe junctions.

There is also an impact on our bus routes. We do not have opportunities as a result of huge numbers of bus routes being axed and train services being plagued by cancellations. In relation to communities in the Highlands and other rural areas, as well as investing in the A9, we need to ensure that there are better railway services.

We need a joined-up set of approaches nationally and across every region. We have regularly highlighted the SNP Government's brutal cuts to our council budgets, which have hit people's roads and pavements. We need to look at buses, because too many people have a bus pass but cannot use it. Lothian Buses shows what can be done, but Glasgow has waited six years for bus franchising, and far too many rural communities have lost services.

We must invest in transport, and we need joined-up thinking, because transport is essential infrastructure. Given that, a decade on, only 13 per cent of the A9 dualling is complete, the SNP Government has no ground to stand on.

16:40

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's amendment and the much-needed detail that it provides. Her amendment and the motion mention the A77 and the A75—two roads in the south-west of Scotland that need major investment. Mr Carson has highlighted well the number of lives lost and families affected. The A77 connects Scotland's central belt to Ireland via the port of Cairnryan and is economically vital to Scotland.

I want to highlight the good work that is under way by Transport Scotland on the Crocketford and Springholm bypass design development, which, when complete, will mean that every settlement along almost 100 miles of the A75 will have been bypassed. The A77 Maybole bypass was

completed three years ago and has been improving travel since it opened. Investment has been made of more than £100 million on improvements along the two roads since the SNP came to power, along with more than £300 million on maintenance, but that is still not enough.

Finlay Carson: Will Emma Harper give way?

Emma Harper: I will not take an intervention. I usually do, but I have only four minutes—apologies.

Like everyone in Dumfries and Galloway, I want to see more investment, and the quicker the better. It does not help that successive UK Governments have squeezed and squeezed Scotland's capital spending budget in the name of the economic disaster that is austerity. We need continued investment in transport in the south-west, as the cabinet secretary rightly noted in her amendment. I welcome the cabinet secretary's work with the south-west Scotland transport alliance and the A77 action group.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's amendment highlighting the need for improvements to rest stops for freight drivers, which Sue Webber's motion also mentions. I want to focus the remainder of my time on rest stops. I recently met the Road Haulage Association. One of the main items that came out of our discussions was the need for better facilities for HGV drivers. HGV drivers are the hidden heroes and heroines of our economy, which we saw especially during the Covid lockdown. The entire logistics system that keeps almost everything in our society supplied and stocked can only function with them working safely and efficiently, so the working conditions that they operate under are hugely important.

Unfortunately, the level of provision that is currently in place on our trunk roads does not match that level of importance. None of us would accept being told that there were no toilets in the building where we work, yet, while Scotland lags behind with the rest areas that are provided, that is, in essence, what many HGV drivers are being told. The second strategic transport projects review specifically noted that investing in lorry parks and rest facilities for drivers would

"significantly improve working conditions for Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers",

and that

"Improvements to facilities would, therefore, also help support the Scottish economy and its growth"

by supporting and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of key supply chains.

Motorways have service stations that operate privately but are regulated and controlled by Government and that provide a basic level of facilities for all drivers, free of charge. However,

trunk roads have no such regulation and no such facilities, except where private operators have set them up of their own volition. I wrote to Transport Scotland asking whether there were plans for some provision of rest facilities along the A75, either as part of the Crocketford and Springholm project or somewhere else on the route. I was disappointed to hear recently that the answer to whether it would pursue that at this time was no. I ask the cabinet secretary to perhaps nudge her officials in Transport Scotland into thinking again and to look to Europe and at some of the incredible facilities that it has for its road hauliers.

Today is 10 December, which is human rights day, commemorating the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948. I would like us to support our HGV drivers and their human right to dignity. They need facilities in which to take a break, have a shower and use the loo. The men and women who keep our shops, hospitals, supermarkets, chemists, factories, farms and everything else stocked 365 days a year deserve nothing less.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the closing speeches.

16:44

Mark Ruskell: I will start on a note of consensus and refer to the points that Emma Harper has just made. I do not think any member in the chamber would disagree about the need for investment that she set out.

I have not yet heard a single member speak in favour of the Westminster Government's proposed punitive tax on EVs. It singles those vehicles out and discriminates against them. To answer Jamie Halcro Johnston's question, I do not know whether that represents a wider approach from the Treasury on demand management. However, if it does, it is starting at the wrong end. It should be starting with sport utility vehicles—SUVs—and not EVs.

The Treasury's assumption is that driving an EV is low cost. It is low cost, but only if people are able to charge their EVs at home and get access to a low-cost tariff. When I charge my EV at home, I am paying about 8.5p per kilowatt hour at night, which means that my mileage costs are about 2p a mile. However, if I go to a public charger such as those provided by Perth and Kinross Council, I am paying 55p per kilowatt hour. We cannot get into a situation where the cost of EV use starts to creep up above the cost of petrol and diesel. That would absolutely stall the transition to EVs, and it would blow a hole in the Government's climate plan. The cost of electricity is clearly a political issue, including in relation to the roll-out of heat pumps

and the general electrification of our entire society, but it is a critical issue that we need to get right.

Members mentioned all sorts of projects during the debate, and many projects are mentioned in the motion and the amendments. However, I am disappointed that not a single member has mentioned the A83. All the projects that have been discussed are partly about safety, and they are also about making the roads faster, but people in Argyll are completely and utterly cut off when the Rest and Be Thankful is closed. We need to get serious about investment in climate adaptation, because a lot of our roads are simply going to crumble away as we start to go beyond 1.5°. We are seeing more extreme weather events, and the Rest and Be Thankful is a classic example of what can happen.

We need to get real about the economic impact and the cost of road-building programmes. I am seeing an increasing proportion of Government revenue going on servicing the private finance initiative and other models that were used to procure roads in the first place. We do not want to get to a situation where the entire transport budget is eaten up by more and more projects that become harder and harder to maintain and build. There is no magic money tree here.

I go back to the exchange that I had with Finlay Carson. Let us consider the costs of projects that have been named in the debate—£3.7 billion for the A9 from Perth to Inverness, up to £5 billion for the A96 from Inverness to Aberdeen, £64 million for the A77, and £50 million for the A75. That £9 billion of spending on four major road-building projects in Scotland is an exorbitant amount. It is the equivalent of 200 years of the Scottish Government's budget for all road safety interventions on all roads.

Jamie Greene talked about a moral imperative. There is absolutely a moral imperative to invest in all roads in Scotland. Over the summer, very sadly, I attended a fatal road traffic accident on the A85. Wherever such deaths occur, there are too many. We need to be cutting casualties and making our roads safer—and I am referring to all roads. There is a need to invest here. I accept that there is a need to invest in the A9. There is a need to invest in junctions and a need to invest in parts of the A9 that are currently dualled but where there have still been accidents. However, that needs to be investment in what works, and it needs to drive down the casualty rate.

I want a national transport strategy that is reasonable, sensible and evidence based and that starts to push some Government funding towards projects that will work—ones that will improve safety, keep us connected and, ultimately, get us to a better place as a nation.

16:49

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Transport links are the very arteries through which our communities' life-blood flows, both economically and socially. They are essential. Throughout Scotland, the areas with the poorest transport networks are those that are facing the greatest depopulation. Sarah Boyack was about the only person in the debate who mentioned ferries, which are the roads for our island communities. However, not a day goes by when there is not disruption of some sort to ferry services, which impacts on island economies and leads to depopulation.

Daniel Johnson, Sarah Boyack and most other speakers in the debate talked about the A9. In that regard, I encourage the Scottish Government to introduce a duty of candour, as the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee has suggested, because the public has lost confidence that progress will be made. The Scottish Government needs to publish the advice that it has received from Transport Scotland officials relating to the financial viability and deliverability of the A9 dualling programme.

At the start, the programme was estimated to cost £3.7 billion, and it was due to be completed in 2025. A decade on, it is only 13 per cent of the way towards completion. There has been consideration of bringing in private finance, but with some of the hardest sections of the A9 still to go, even the new 2035 target now looks optimistic.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Sarah Boyack did not take my intervention, so I will ask now whether you are embarrassed that, in the eight years when the Labour Party was in government, it did not dual even one mile of the A9.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair, Mr Halcro Johnston.

Rhoda Grant: The Labour and Lib Dem Executive carried out improvements to the A9—there were deadly junctions that were improved. We certainly support the dualling of the A9.

Jamie Halcro Johnston and Jamie Greene talked about fatalities on the road. Driver error is mitigated by the design of the road, which is something else that the Labour Party oversaw when it was in government.

Finlay Carson and others talked about the A75 and A77. Those are crucial lifeline roads that also enable links between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Daniel Johnson talked about an area that is close to my heart, which is the west of Scotland. The A82 is poorly served, and so is the A83. As Mark Ruskell mentioned, the Rest and Be Thankful is also a huge issue.

Sarah Boyack talked about local government cuts and how they are creating problems with our local roads. There have been £329 million of cuts to core council funding between 2013-14 and 2025-26, and local roads are crumbling because of that.

I will also mention the Stromeferry bypass in my area, where a landslip would create a 130-mile diversion—and there is a weak bridge on the same road. That is a lifeline route, yet the Scottish Government refuses to help.

Mark Ruskell talked about public transport. There is a desperate need for better public transport. However, many areas in rural Scotland have no public transport at all.

I know that I am running out of time. There are so many issues with all our transport systems—we have hardly touched on rail—that we could spend a whole day highlighting them. There are issues with roads, ferries, rail and other public transport—the whole lot. As Sarah Boyack said, for Scotland to work, we need an industrial strategy that is joined to Scotland's transport infrastructure. The Scottish Government needs to do better.

16:53

Fiona Hyslop: This debate provides an opportunity to highlight the progress that the Government has made in maintaining and improving the transport network to enhance connectivity, decarbonise road transport and generate sustainable economic growth. It has also allowed members of all parties to say where they have serious concerns and frustrations. We need to go further to support trunk roads in their constituencies.

I welcome Daniel Johnson to his new transport portfolio and, to address his point about the centrality of transport to the economy and economic growth, I commend to him the value of the transport report that I commissioned.

I agreed with a lot of the important points that Mark Ruskell made in his summing-up speech. He wants a wider debate, as does Rhoda Grant, but I did not set the timing of the debate, nor the motion that I am responding to.

This SNP Government has built 33 major trunk road projects since 2007 and, in the process, constructed more than 280km of new trunk road, which has cost nearly £3 billion.

In the course of the debate, I have listened carefully to the arguments on progressing with dualling works on the A9 between Perth and Inverness and improvements on the A96, A75 and A77 corridors. I reiterate that the Government is committed to delivering, and is on track to deliver, the A9 dualling by 2035. Anyone who drives along

the road will see the works that are happening now.

On the Conservatives' call for an emergency law to accelerate the dualling of the A9, it is not clear what benefits, if any, the suggested emergency law would provide. The Scottish Government has already completed the statutory process for 10 out of the 11 projects in the dualling programme, which account for more than 92 per cent of the length to be dualled. Draft orders and an environmental impact assessment for the only project that is yet to complete the statutory process—the section between Pass of Birnam and Tay crossing—were published for comment in May.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I need to go into the detail of the process. It is essential that people who are directly impacted have the right to formally comment on the proposals and that consideration is given to those comments in the decision-making process. The suggested Conservative law would cut across existing legislation, which supports public participation in environmental decision making, thereby bypassing and silencing the rights and views of people in Dunkeld and the surrounding area.

In addition to progressing the A9 dualling programme, the Government is committed to dualling the A96, starting with the Inverness to Nairn section, which includes the Nairn bypass. Emma Roddick set out the importance of the order in which things are done and the need for the Nairn bypass, in particular, along with the Inshes to Smithton link road. The Scottish Government is also leading on taking forward proposals to bypass the settlements of Springholm and Crockettford on the A75.

We are progressing a number of other improvements across Scotland's road network. I say to Mark Ruskell that we are addressing climate mitigation—that work includes the key project on the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful, which is designed to mitigate the risk of landslides. We are promoting a new grade-separated junction at Laurencekirk on the A90, and I assure members that we are committed to improving the A75 and A77 trunk roads, as well as the wider transport network in south-west Scotland.

I want to move on to electric vehicles and our commitment to decarbonising road transport. Since 2011, the Scottish Government has invested more than £65 million in expanding Scotland's public electric vehicle charging network. As a direct result of that, Scotland has a public charging network that compares favourably with that in any other part of the UK. Scotland has more than

7,400 public charge points, and we met our commitment to provide 6,000 charge points two years ahead of target. The latest official UK Government statistics show that, per head of population, Scotland currently has more rapid and ultra-rapid charge points than any other part of the UK.

The Scottish Government continues to support the expansion of public charging infrastructure through our £30 million electric vehicle infrastructure fund for council consortia. In addition, in August this year, I announced the provision of a further £4.5 million specifically to support public charging in rural and island communities, and we expect the guidance for Scotland on cross-pavement charging, which is being led by the Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists, to be ready soon. There is a pilot cross-pavement charging fund in three local authority areas, including East Lothian, where I launched that funding.

The Scottish Government rejects the ill-thought-out EV charge per mile policy of the UK Labour Government, which many members have mentioned. It will hit rural Scotland hardest and, as many have said, it represents a disincentive to switching to EV cars just when we need people to do so at scale. The Office for Budget Responsibility itself asserts—

Daniel Johnson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I will address the member's point.

According to the OBR's own assessment, hundreds of thousands of drivers will not switch to electric vehicles because of that tax policy, so it will not help to address climate change. The UK Government needs to engage on a four-nations basis in a comprehensive reform of motoring taxation to enable a long-term transition to EV charging. A Westminster committee said that the proposed policy would result in a £15 billion loss in other forms of car taxation. I also agree with what Jamie Greene said. If the policy is being driven solely by the Treasury in Whitehall and does not take on board the transport situation, the geography of Scotland and climate change, it is doomed to fail. The issue needs to be addressed, and I have continually suggested that to successive UK transport ministers.

We remain firmly committed to delivering infrastructure that provides the connectivity, the decarbonised road transport and the sustainable economic growth that Scotland needs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Douglas Lumsden to wind up the debate.

16:59

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)

(Con): I thank colleagues from across the chamber who have so clearly set out the challenges that our road networks face.

I want to start by acknowledging the very real and life-changing consequences of not getting our road infrastructure right. Tragically, last weekend, two of my constituents, both just 24, died as a result of a crash between the Toll of Birness and Mintlaw. They were a young couple with so much life ahead of them, and their deaths are all the more tragic because of the dangerous nature of the roads north of Aberdeen. Those of us who live and work there know that it is dangerous, and we will continue to call on the Government to make safety improvements. That is why I brought this debate to the chamber: to make our roads safer and to save lives.

The variety of MSPs who have spoken today make it very clear that the problem with our roads is an issue from the very north to the very south of Scotland. Whether you are in the north-east or the south-west, our trunk road system is not fit for purpose for today's needs. If we are to encourage growth, build economic prosperity and make the most of our industries, we need a road network that meets our ambitions and requirements. It is not just an economic issue. As I mentioned earlier, it is a matter of life and death. Today, we have heard of the tragic consequences of our poor roads and the undualled A9, A96, A75 and A77. We have heard about families left devastated and communities rocked when people are killed and injured on our roads.

Back in 2011, the SNP first promised, in its manifesto, to dual the A96 by 2030. The SNP has now promised a refined package for the route. The refined package, which is more of a regressed package, is not much use when you are a business trying to move your goods between Inverness and Aberdeen, and it does not help rural communities, who are left wanting—unconnected and struggling to access the rest of Scotland safely. The SNP says—it has repeated it today—that it supports the dualling of the A96. If that is the case, come back with a timescale and a plan, so that we can all see it. Over the past four years, all that it has done is kick the can down the road. It is all too wishy-washy, just like the SNP's amendment to the motion. There are bits of the amendment that I agree with, but it makes no commitments on the projects that we highlight in the motion, which is why we cannot support it.

We are used to broken promises from the SNP, whether it is on dualling the A9, the A96 or even, as once promised by Alex Salmond, the A90 between Aberdeen and Peterhead. Whatever happened to that promise? There has been no

mention of that promise by the cabinet secretary today. The sad reality is that these delays and broken SNP promises are leading to deaths on our roads and in our rural communities. Sadly, the Parliament is becoming numb to the repeated deaths that happen week in, week out. This is not good enough, and this SNP Government needs to realise that it is to blame. Jamie Greene highlighted the lives that have been lost on the A9. The number of deaths would be less if the Government had stuck to the timescale that it had promised.

There were questions about whether this should have been a wider debate. If it had been, I am sure that Sue Webber would have spent four minutes talking about Winchburgh station. She also highlighted the value of the logistics industry and spoke about the lack of rest stops, which will become more important as we move towards electric or hybrid HGVs or hydrogen vehicles. On the lack of toilet facilities, Emma Harper made the point very well: we would not put up with a lack of facilities in this building, but that is what we are asking our logistics drivers to do day in, day out.

The Labour proposal to charge EVs 3p per mile seems a bit of a back-of-a-fag-packet policy, to be honest. It would hammer rural drivers, and I have no idea what would happen if you were driving a hybrid vehicle—whether you would have to pay double.

Daniel Johnson: What would the member say to the fact that the policy was first drafted under Jeremy Hunt's tenure in the Treasury?

Douglas Lumsden: It was, and it was absolutely rejected, because we knew that we had to incentivise people to get into EVs.

As Sue Webber pointed out, EV charging is a lottery. Mark Ruskell made a good point about the fact that there is inequality in the cost of charging an EV. If you are lucky enough to have a driveway, you will pay a much lower rate—Mark Ruskell quoted 8.5p per kilowatt hour—but, if you have to go to a public charger, it might be 55p per kilowatt hour or, if you use a fast charger in a service station, it might be 85p per kilowatt hour. That needs to be looked at quickly. I agree with something that Daniel Johnson said, namely that it is about connecting Scotland—that there is value to our economy of upgrading links. For example, upgrading the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen would bring huge economic benefits. The same goes for the A75 and the A77. It is all about trade, linking Scotland to Northern Ireland—a point that Fin Carson made. I could feel Fin Carson's frustration, because "Wait" is what we hear all the time. There are new reports, new studies and more dither and delay from the SNP Government.

Emma Harper seemed to paint a rosy picture of what has been going on with the A75 and A77, but it would be interesting to know whether the people whom she represents think the same. It is bizarre that she talked about the lack of rest stops. There have been 18 years of SNP Government; it has had the time to get that right.

Rural communities are angry. That is why the Scottish Conservatives brought the debate to the chamber. We want to talk about the issues that the public are talking about and the challenges that they face. They want to know whether they will have a job next month and whether they will be able to drive to it—because there is no public transport—on decent roads that are safe.

Only the Scottish Conservatives are committed to bringing in legislation so that work could start immediately on the dualling of the entire A9 and key sections of the A75. We would take swift action, cut through red tape and recognise the reality of the challenges that are faced by rural Scotland. The failing SNP Government and the feckless London Labour Government are harming Scotland. The sooner that they are gone, the better.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes the debate on connecting Scotland, and it is time to move on to the next item of business, which is an urgent question.

Point of Order

17:06

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Before we get to the urgent question, I will quote your words from yesterday:

“The ‘Scottish Ministerial Code’ states:

‘The Scottish Government should be accountable to the Scottish Parliament’.

As a matter of courtesy and respect, I would expect that, when a minister cannot provide information in answer to a question in the chamber, and when the minister has committed to providing that answer in the chamber, they should undertake to provide such detail to the member as soon as it is available.”—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2025; c 95-6.]

Five minutes ago—at 1 minute past 5—I received the information that I had requested back on 25 November. Half an hour before that, the Scottish Government published the information on its website. I ask for your understanding of and reaction to what I believe is a discourtesy not just to the Parliament, but to you personally, given your ruling last night.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am not aware of publication this afternoon, but I reiterate whole-heartedly the comments that I made yesterday in the chamber, and I certainly ask that the Government reflect on those comments.

Urgent Question

17:07

Professor Alexis Jay (Correspondence)

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will release all correspondence between the Scottish Government and Professor Alexis Jay, and what mechanism will be used to provide this information to MSPs and Parliament.

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): Yes, and I apologise for not already doing so direct to Parliament and to the member, as we had committed to doing. I issued Mr Ross with the information today and provided it to the Education, Children and Young People Committee. As Mr Ross has stated, the information is also on the Scottish Government's website.

Douglas Ross: That is shocking, and I am glad that the First Minister is here, because he has serious questions to answer. Not only was it discourteous to members—I say “members” because people across the political spectrum have been asking for that correspondence for months—but, just yesterday, 24 hours ago, the minister said that she could not provide the information, that it would go through the freedom of information process and that it might be published by the end of the year. The Government had to be shamed into publishing it today. However, it could not even do that right. It could not even give the Parliament the courtesy of providing that information to the members who had asked for it. It released it early under FOI, then came to MSPs after 5 o'clock. I do not know the reason or the explanation for that. The Presiding Officer has asked the Government to reflect. I think that we need a statement from the Government about what it was doing.

Here is the issue: we know why the information had to be dragged out of the Scottish Government. John Swinney is staring right in front of him—he cannot look at me now—because I am about to say that he is going to lose his justice secretary.

Angela Constance is either going to have to resign or be sacked for misleading Parliament. In black and white, it is clear that the justice secretary did not tell the truth to the chamber. In black and white, it is clear that Professor Alexis Jay wanted the correction to be made.

I will read out the full quote from Professor Jay's letter. It says:

“I have expressed no views on Mr Kerr's amendment, but I am of the opinion that the Scottish Government should urgently take steps to establish reliable data about the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation by organised

networks, of which so-called ‘grooming gangs’ is only one component. In the context of the national strategic group, I have had discussions with officials about how this might be achieved.”

Her final line is:

“I would appreciate my position being clarified”.

That letter was sent to the Scottish Government—to the justice secretary—on 26 September. It was 8 October when the Government put the information into minutes. On 18 November, the minutes of the meeting were published. On 19 November, we got the Scottish Government's first response, replying to my colleague Russell Findlay. It has been trying to hide this because it is trying to protect its cabinet secretary. Is that not right?

Natalie Don-Innes: There were a number of points in there. I start by saying that it was always my intention to provide the information, therefore I repeat my apology to the chamber and the Presiding Officer for the confusion that my letter to Mr Ross has caused. I have made all the correspondence between the Scottish Government and Professor Jay available today.

On the rest of Mr Ross's question, I have been very clear about this before—I think that I made this same statement in my answer to the urgent question on 19 November. Mr Ross quoted Alexis Jay, and I want to put the facts on record once again.

Ms Constance noted specifically that Professor Jay had been the chair of an independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in England and Wales and that Professor Jay had put on record in the past that, in regard to child sexual abuse and exploitation,

“people should just get on with it”.

Of course, it was minuted at the strategic group's meeting in October that the quote was correct but that it was from January and not made in relation to the amendment to the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill. Ms Constance did not state that Professor Jay was speaking directly about the amendment. She made a general point on Professor Jay's views on calls for inquiries and said that she also wanted to get on with the work needed to protect our children.

Given the seriousness of the issue at hand, I think that that should be the focus of all of us in the Parliament going forward.

Douglas Ross: It should be the focus of the Parliament, but it is not, because we have been misled. Ministers have not been truthful. They have had to be dragged to the chamber to provide the information that they have been sitting on, not for weeks but for months.

This goes right to the very top, to John Swinney, and it is now a test of his leadership. I believe that, when he leaves the chamber tonight, he will be asked by the media whether he fully supports his justice secretary—and he cannot, because these documents make it very clear that she misled Parliament and that she did not take the immediate opportunity to correct the record.

I will go through that timeline again.

The Presiding Officer: Very briefly, Mr Ross.

Douglas Ross: On 26 September, Alexis Jay sent an email to the Government. On 8 October, there was a meeting of the national strategic group. On 18 November, the minutes of that meeting were published. On 19 November, there was a request for the correspondence. On 25 November, Angela Constance denied misrepresenting Professor Alexis Jay. However, the emails that we have now seen show that the professor said that the “current position” was “unsatisfactory” because the Government would not publish her letter.

Where is the justice secretary and why is she not here in the chamber? Does the minister believe—as I think most people will now—that the justice secretary’s position is untenable and that she should resign tonight or be sacked?

Natalie Don-Innes: I have been very clear in relation to the points that Mr Ross has made. He started his response to my previous answer by saying that there has been no focus on the issue. I whole-heartedly disagree, and I am very happy to set out again the steps that we are going to take.

Last week, we announced that Professor Alexis Jay has been appointed the independent chair for the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group. There will be an independent national review of the response to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation in Scotland. Once the independent national review is complete, the group, independently chaired by Professor Jay, will consider the findings and provide advice to ministers on next steps. That goes hand in hand with the Police Scotland review that is under way. We have also been clear that there will be a statement on the matter next week.

As I say, I have been very open and transparent in my answer to Mr Ross’s original question. I am happy to put on record the number of actions that this Government is taking to deal with this serious issue.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): From what we have just heard, it is clear cut that Professor Alexis Jay’s advice in that letter was consistent with this Parliament supporting the Tory amendment to the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill. That is clear. However,

rather than bring clarity last week on the review on grooming gangs, there is further confusion about who is leading the review. Last week, the Government seemed to give the impression that Professor Alexis Jay is leading it, but all press reports say that that is not the case. Can the minister confirm which of the two groups is leading the review? Is it His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland or the strategic group? We need to know who is leading it.

I highlighted in last week’s debate that there was a list of 46 children—including Taylor, who is a victim—and Police Scotland said that there would be an investigation. Given the importance of the issue—I also said this last week—I would like to know whether that list is included in the review on grooming gangs before we get to the question whether we need a full-blown inquiry.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members of the substantive question. Minister, please answer in that regard.

Natalie Don-Innes: For clarity, last week we announced that Professor Alexis Jay has been appointed as the independent chair of the national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group. We also announced that the Care Inspectorate and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland will lead an independent national review of responses to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation. In support of that work, Professor Jay met the chief inspector of constabulary and senior officials from the Care Inspectorate to offer her expertise and to progress that work at pace. Further detail on that will be set out in the Government’s statement next week.

Once that independent national review is complete, the group, which is chaired by Professor Jay, as I have just stated, will then consider the findings and provide further advice to ministers on next steps.

On Ms McNeill’s second point, I will have to come back to her with the details.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The SNP has been shamed into finally issuing this FOI response, albeit that it is redacted. It confirms that the cabinet secretary misrepresented Professor Jay, but instead of coming clean, the Government embarked on a contemptuous cover-up, in breach of the ministerial code.

I empathise with the minister for the position that her Government has put her in, but does she know whether the cabinet secretary has offered her resignation?

The Presiding Officer: Minister, again, please answer in relation to the substantive question.

Natalie Don-Innes: I have been very clear about the facts that have been laid out in relation

to the quotes that have been put forward by Ms Constance and Alexis Jay. We have got to the bottom of it, we can draw a line under it and we can focus on the serious work ahead in relation to this most important issue.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children advises that the Scottish Government needs to show leadership. The cabinet secretary has responded to questions on grooming gangs in the chamber, but when it comes to any question that involves correspondence between herself and Alexis Jay, she is either nowhere to be seen or not at her post to answer questions.

Given that the minister was not able to answer questions that Pauline McNeill put to the Government, I ask again: who is leading on the review into grooming gangs? It is still not clear. Does the minister believe that the behaviours of the cabinet secretary jeopardise the non-inquiry review, even before it gets off the ground?

The Presiding Officer: Again, minister, please answer in relation to the substantive question.

Natalie Don-Innes: I have given this response three times now. The Care Inspectorate and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland are leading an independent national review of responses to group-based child sexual abuse. That goes hand in hand with the work of the national child sexual abuse and exploitation group, which is led by Professor Alexis Jay.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): Has the *Official Report* been corrected yet? If it has not, why not?

The Presiding Officer: I must remind members that there is a substantive question in the *Business Bulletin*, and it is important that subsequent questions refer to that question. If the minister wishes, she can respond in that regard.

Natalie Don-Innes: I have taken the steps that I felt to be appropriate. I have come to the chamber today and, as I said, I have been very open and transparent around the confusion and the mix-up that have taken place. The information has now been provided in full and, as I said, I would now like to focus my attention on the serious matters at hand and the steps that we are taking to combat them.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the urgent question.

Douglas Ross: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have two points to raise. First, will you accept a motion without notice for the First Minister to be able to update Parliament on whether he still has confidence in his justice secretary, and whether she has offered her resignation to him?

Secondly, Presiding Officer, can you confirm that if there has been no update to the *Official Report*, as requested in Sharon Dowe's question, that is a breach of the code of conduct for MSPs, given that MSPs must update the *Official Report* with any corrections as soon as they are made aware of their error?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am sure that all members are aware of the mechanisms that exist to correct the *Official Report*.

With regard to Mr Ross's other point, we will proceed with business as scheduled this afternoon. There will be other opportunities to discuss these matters.

Business Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-20101, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a change to business.

Apologies—I ask members to bear with me for a moment. Thank you. I just wished to confirm that I had the correct motion number.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 11 December 2025—

after

followed by Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Debate: British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry

insert

followed by Financial Resolution: Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill—[Graeme Dey]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-20068, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I call the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 16 December 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 17 December 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;

Health and Social Care

followed by

Ministerial Statement: Protecting Children from Harm

followed by

Criminal Justice Committee Debate: Cybercrime

followed by

Motion on Legislative Consent: Pension Schemes Bill – UK Legislation

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Thursday 18 December 2025

11.40 am

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am

General Questions

12.00 pm

First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Portfolio Questions: Social Justice and Housing

followed by

Stage 1 Debate: Contract (Formation and Remedies) (Scotland) Bill

followed by

Motion on Legislative Consent: Sentencing Bill – UK Legislation

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

3.10 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Tuesday 6 January 2026

2.00 pm

Time for Reflection

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Topical Questions

followed by

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Debate: Legal Aid

followed by

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee Debate: Petition PE2018: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open

followed by

Committee Announcements

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Wednesday 7 January 2026

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

Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by

Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Thursday 8 January 2026
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Education and Skills
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Building Safety Levy
 (Scotland) Bill
followed by Financial Resolution: Building Safety
 Levy (Scotland) Bill
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 15 December 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.—[*Graeme Dey*]

The Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Lumsden to speak to and move amendment S6M-20068.1.

17:22

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): There is a spare slot next Thursday, so, instead of MSPs sloping off early—

Members: Oh!

Douglas Lumsden: —let us make the most of the little time that we have left in the current session of Parliament—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another, colleagues.

Douglas Lumsden: Let us make the most of the little time we have left in the session and have a debate on the Scottish National Party Government's energy strategy.

When we come back in January, there will be a birthday, but it is not one to celebrate. It will have been three years since the SNP Government published its draft energy strategy; three years since the SNP announced its presumption against new oil and gas; and three years since the SNP turned its back on the oil and gas workers in the north-east, with the loss of thousands of jobs. One can see why, therefore, it is not a birthday to celebrate.

I have asked the SNP Government about 20 times if a new energy strategy will be published,

but each time I have been met with a blank look, as if the lights are on but no one is in. However, maybe today will be different and the failing SNP Government will agree to my amendment. Just this week, the First Minister has been keen to speak about energy. He has chased the headline "It's Scotland's Energy", claiming that he could save people a third off their bills. That is a bold claim, but he gave us absolutely no detail about how that would happen.

The time next week would be an ideal opportunity for the SNP Government to set out its fantasy plans. Will those plans mean more onshore wind infrastructure scarring our countryside, or is the First Minister now in favour of zonal pricing, which his Government did not previously support? Does he want to stop the monster pylons that are costing billions—

Members: Oh!

Douglas Lumsden: All of those will have to be clawed back in our bills. Will he be scrapping carbon levies that are adding to our bills and making our manufacturing industry uncompetitive, all in the name of net zero? Will he be looking to install more expensive floating offshore wind, all of which is subsidised through contracts for difference by bill payers right across the United Kingdom, adding more to our bills? How will our baseload be provided? Since the First Minister will not allow nuclear, does he plan to turn our rural communities into one huge battery storage system? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Lumsden.

Douglas Lumsden: Using the time next week for debate would give the SNP Government the chance to come clean on its fantasy claims and answer those questions. The debate could also give the Government the opportunity to defend the conflict of interest that my constituents in the north-east find so worrying, which is the fact that the chair of SSEN is one of the First Minister's advisers for the ministerial code of conduct. We have a situation where the energy minister meets SSEN regularly but fails to meet concerned community groups who are seeing their countryside being ruined by monster pylons, substations and battery storage, and the First Minister and his advisers turn a blind eye. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the member.

Douglas Lumsden: It stinks, Presiding Officer. It is clear that, when it comes to approving large-scale energy infrastructure projects, Gillian Martin gets to be the judge, jury and executioner. She fails to listen to the voices of our communities but

is happy to jet-set around the world in business class to sell our countryside to the highest bidder.

Having the debate next week would give an opportunity to members of the Parliament who took part in a convention in Inverness four months ago to fulfil the promise that they made to the public on that day. During that convention, MSPs signed up to

“Undertake to do all that we can across our representative parties to secure urgent debates at both Holyrood and in the House of Commons at Westminster on the attached Unified Statement of the Highland Convention of Community Councils dated 14th June 2025.”

The statement was about looking at the impact of energy projects on local communities and the damage that they were causing. Douglas Ross signed it, as did Jamie Halcro Johnston, Tim Eagle and Fergus Ewing, as well as Emma Roddick and Maree Todd. An SNP minister, no less, signed up to have more debating time on energy infrastructure in the chamber. If she does not support my amendment, in effect, she will have deliberately misled the 400 attendees of the convention in Inverness.

We have time next week, so let us use it to have a full debate on the impact of energy infrastructure on our communities and finally have some answers on the energy strategy.

I move amendment S6M-20068.1, to leave out from third “followed by Business Motions” to “3.10 pm Decision Time” and insert:

“followed by Scottish Government Debate: Energy Strategy

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time”.

The Presiding Officer: I call Graeme Dey to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:27

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): Although the member is entitled to raise the matter by this means, it is disappointing, to say the least, that his suggestion for debate has not been raised with me through the normal bureau process and that we are debating an amendment to the business motion. Many members will see that for what it is. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Graeme Dey: On the substance of his ask, the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy recently sent a letter to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to provide an update on the Scottish Government’s energy

strategy and just transition plan. The letter outlined that there have been significant changes in the energy sector since the draft energy strategy was published. Those include the establishment of the National Energy System Operator, which the Scottish Government jointly commissions, alongside the Welsh and UK Governments, to produce a strategic spatial energy plan. The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy will also be providing evidence to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on 14 January about a number of petitions, including the request to publish an energy strategy.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Although I agree that lodging an amendment of this kind without taking it through the business bureau is clearly performative and has been done as a wheeze rather than as a serious proposal for a serious debate—

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. My understanding is that the time is allocated so that any member can lodge a change to the business motion. To call us performative is an insult to other members in the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: Members can raise issues that they wish to have debated at this point, but the content of members’ contributions is generally a matter for them. The chair will intervene where required.

Patrick Harvie: Having made that comment, I would like the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans and his Government colleagues to be aware that others—not those who want a debate based on doubling down on the fossil fuel industry or chasing the votes of climate deniers—want a serious update on the energy strategy. We want an update to be given not just to the petitions committee, but to the Parliament.

Those of us who want to see an energy strategy that is based on serious climate policy also expect to see that brought to the chamber, although not as a result of a short-term proposal for a debate at the last minute. I think that the entire Parliament expects such a debate to happen in the new year, because the Government will not be able to go into the next election without making clear whether it supports doubling down on the fossil fuel industry or maintaining the presumption against new oil and gas extraction.

Graeme Dey: Given all the activity that I have noted and the fact that there is already a parliamentary process covering the topic, the request for a debate, certainly ahead of that concluding, is unnecessary. However, I take Patrick Harvie’s point. It is, of course, open to the member who raised the issue—and, indeed, to Mr Harvie—to pick it up with his business manager,

for the matter to be discussed at the Parliamentary Bureau. That is how the bureau and this Parliament work.

I say gently to Douglas Lumsden that talking of MSPs “sloping off” on a Thursday afternoon is a bit rich considering the barren nature of his party’s benches pretty much every Thursday.

The Presiding Officer: The question is that, amendment S6M-20068.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20068, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

17:31

Meeting suspended.

17:33

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-20068.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20068, in the name of Graeme Dey. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not work. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 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)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20068.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, is: For 34, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20068, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 16 December 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 17 December 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;
 Health and Social Care

followed by Ministerial Statement: Protecting Children from Harm

followed by Criminal Justice Committee Debate: Cybercrime

followed by Motion on Legislative Consent: Pension Schemes Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 18 December 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Portfolio Questions:
 Social Justice and Housing

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Contract (Formation and Remedies) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Motion on Legislative Consent: Sentencing Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

3.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Tuesday 6 January 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Debate: Legal Aid

followed by Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee Debate: Petition PE2018: Recognise the value of swimming pools and provide financial relief to help keep pools open

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 January 2026

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 Scottish Conservative and Unionist
Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 January 2026

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Building Safety Levy
(Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Building Safety
Levy (Scotland) Bill

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 15 December 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.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-20069, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on timetabling of a bill at stage 2.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 12 December 2025.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:35

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-20070, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Support (Improvement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

17:35

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Tonight has shown the shocking state that the Government is in and the desperate need for change. Let me tell members a tale of grand ambitions and puffed-up promises—

Members: Oh!

Tim Eagle: Members can sigh, but I will go on for a few minutes yet.

In actual fact, the Government has delivered a policy so wet that it is turning our farms into bureaucratic bogs. Before us stands a party that once said that it would make Scotland a global leader in sustainable agriculture and that it would support food production, fight climate change and back rural communities. Yes, that is the Scottish National Party—ever the deliverer of words; rarely, if ever, the deliverer of action.

When the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 was passed, the SNP promised a five-year rural support plan—a genuine Scottish framework giving farmers, crofters and food producers real certainty about the future. Fast forward to December 2025, and what do we have? There is no rural support plan and we have a change to the Scottish suckler beef support scheme, as the Government failed to get it right the first time. That is now being amended in the SSI after we told the Government to do that.

We also have new greening rules before us—
[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Eagle.

Tim Eagle: We have umpteen pages of regulation just to get a slice of what used to be simple support.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of interests, which shows that I am a

partner in a farming business and a member of NFU Scotland.

The SNP's changes to greening support and removal of exemptions will, as an Orkney farmer told me, have one hell of an impact on our island farmers and crofters, putting additional costs and burdens on them. It is absolutely right that the Scottish Conservatives are voting against the SSI tonight, but does Tim Eagle agree that any MSP who represents island communities that are impacted by the changes should vote against the SSI this evening?

Tim Eagle: I say to Mr Halcro Johnston that anybody who votes for the SSI tonight is, in my opinion, mad, because, given that what the SNP Government said that it would deliver and what it actually has delivered are so far apart, they could not possibly be brought together. It is crazy to vote for that. Suddenly, in this SSI, under the new greening rules, if someone has more than 15 hectares of arable or even temporary grassland, they will have to set aside 5 per cent, which is soon to be 7 per cent. I have no idea why it is 7 per cent—we have just plucked that out of thin air.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It may have been my hearing, but I thought that I heard a mental health slur from a member who has just chastised other members about respect to others. Presiding Officer, in your judgment, was that language respectful?

The Presiding Officer: As we are having a fairly lively debate this evening, I ask all members to please, at all times, be courteous and respectful in your language and think about how that language may impact others.

Tim Eagle: I am happy to discuss that outside the chamber, perhaps. I am not quite sure what I did—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the member.

Tim Eagle: The measures might sound green and virtuous but, as NFU Scotland, which is at the heart of agriculture in Scotland, points out, cramming in more EFAs—ecological focus areas—

“risks undermining mixed and grass-based systems”

as well as hurting small herds and crofts and damaging food production and farm viability, not to mention piling on paperwork and inspection burdens. Greening under tier 2 was once sold as a bold, flexible and farmer-friendly way to deliver climate and biodiversity outcomes with multiple options, but the reality is now very different.

I still have a nagging doubt that the miserable information technology system that we all know so

much about is the real reason for the lack of options that are before us today. We now have policy by drip feed from a Government that is on life support, relying on legacy support and limping on while the future policy framework remains undefined, underfunded and unclear. That is not leadership.

The Scottish Conservatives, including me, believe that farming deserves better rural support. It deserves multi-annual funding, real clarity, respect for those who work the land and even really radical stuff such as support for food production. Perhaps the SNP should stop hiding behind green labels and deliver the support it promised, or step aside and let those who value food—Scotland's rural communities—get on with the real work.

17:40

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I point out to Mr Eagle that, if he does not want to be charged as performative, he should not be performative, because that is exactly what his contribution was. He knows the processes that have been gone through. He knows the debates that have happened. He knows that the matter has been voted on. He also knows that this is the right thing to do.

Presiding Officer, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to make a statement on the regulations. We have committed to providing a replacement Scottish rural development programme scheme, as is set out in the vision for agriculture, the agricultural reform route map and the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024.

Greening changes are part of a phased transition to the new support framework and will allow the greening payments to support the commitment to tier 2 support that is set out in that route map. The regulations improve the provisions for ecological focus areas by requiring more businesses to undertake EFA activities as a condition of their greening payment, which will increase the area of land that is managed for EFA and widen the options and choices that are available for those who undertake such activities. The changes have been designed to ensure that they will deliver environmental improvements while supporting sustainable, productive agricultural businesses.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The minister will be aware of the relatively high take-up of agri-environment measures in Orkney. However, the fact that those cannot be counted as part of the EFAs potentially penalises early adopters of environmental measures. Does he accept those concerns, as well as the concerns

that have been expressed about the scaling up of those measures in future and the implications that they could have, particularly on smaller farm businesses in island areas?

Jim Fairlie: I will address Mr McArthur's points as I go through my speaking notes.

We know that agriculture in Scotland is diverse and that it faces significant challenges due to weather, costs and fragile ecosystems. That has been addressed by reviewing the existing EFA measures and making them more suitable for conditions across all Scotland, including Orkney, while adding more policy value, such as by removing the restriction on grazing green cover before 31 December. To ensure that the changes are fit for Scotland, we have listened to the industry and had wide-ranging engagement with stakeholders, and we will continue to listen, as we always have. We will refine and develop our greening measures to ensure that they work for all rural Scotland.

The regulations also improve the operation of the provisions for the Scottish suckler beef support scheme by introducing a derogation from the calving interval requirements for smaller businesses. That is in response to the concerns that were raised by smaller producers and the Scottish Crofting Federation, because we listen and engage with our stakeholders. The regulations will also extend the application submission period to allow submissions to be made up to 14 January, following the end of the relevant calendar year, which will make it easier for applications to be submitted in time.

The regulations mark a significant point in our progress towards our aim of becoming a world leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, and they deliver on our previous commitments. We got here by co-developing in detail with our partners, and I fully endorse that approach.

The regulations have been considered by the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, which agreed by division to recommend to the Parliament that we approve them, and I invite the Parliament to do so. Failure to bring the regulations into force would undermine the remarkable progress that we have made in our efforts to work with our farmers as we continue to provide direct support, such as the Scottish upland sheep support scheme and the calf scheme, and do all the things that we have done in conjunction with our farming community, which knows that it is being represented by the SNP Government far better than any other Government anywhere in the rest of the United Kingdom.

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 Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S6M-20071, on approval of an SSI, and motion S6M-20072, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Sheep Carcase (Classification and Price Reporting) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Paul O'Kane be appointed as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee; and

Claire Baker be appointed to replace Michael Marra as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.—[*Graeme Dey*]

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

Decision Time

17:44

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Claire Baker will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-20056.3, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20056, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on controlling the rising benefits bill in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the voting system. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gibson. 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)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 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)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20056.3, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, is: For 68, Against 49, Abstentions 5.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Therefore, the amendment in the name of Claire Baker falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-20056, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on controlling the rising benefits bill in Scotland, 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)
 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)
 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)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 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

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)
 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)

McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-20056, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on controlling the rising benefits bill in Scotland, as amended, is: For 72, Against 29, Abstentions 21.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament reaffirms its commitment to the social security principles contained in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and unanimously adopted by the Parliament, including that social security is an investment in the people of Scotland and is itself a human right; welcomes the abolition of the two-child limit across the UK; calls on the UK Labour administration to go further and scrap other damaging welfare reforms implemented by the previous UK administration, including the benefit cap, and supports the Scottish Government's commitment to reinvest funding to end the two-child limit in further measures to tackle child poverty in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Fiona Hyslop is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Daniel Johnson will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-20057.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20057, in the name of Sue Webber, on connecting Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Kenneth Gibson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect, again. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gibson. 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)
 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)
 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)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 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)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (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)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20057.3, in the name

of Fiona Hyslop, is: For 60, Against 60, Abstentions 2.

The vote on the amendment is therefore tied. As is usual when the Parliament has not been able to reach a decision, I am obliged to exercise a casting vote. I will not make a decision for the Parliament. As members will be aware, the established convention is to vote in favour of the status quo, because the chair is required to maintain impartiality. I therefore cast my vote against the amendment.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20057.1, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20057, in the name of Sue Webber, on connecting Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20057.1, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 23, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20057.2, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20057, in the name of Sue Webber, on connecting Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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]
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (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)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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) (Ind)
 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)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 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)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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-22057.2, in the name of Mark Ruskell, is: For 8, Against 114, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20057, in the name of Sue Webber, on connecting Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

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) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstention

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-20057, in the name of Sue Webber, on connecting Scotland, is: For 34, Against 87, Abstentions 1.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20070, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, 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)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Ind)
 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstention

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-20070, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the approval of an SSI, is: For 87, Against 32, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rural Support (Improvement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No 2) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20071, on the approval of an SSI, and motion S6M-20072, on committee membership, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Sheep Carcase (Classification and Price Reporting) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Paul O'Kane be appointed as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee; and

Claire Baker be appointed to replace Michael Marra as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

FIFA World Cup 2026

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-19823, in the name of Keith Brown, on Scotland national football team qualifies for the 2026 FIFA world cup.

The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the Scotland national football team on qualifying for the 2026 FIFA World Cup; recognises that this marks Scotland's first appearance at the tournament in 28 years and represents a significant moment for Scottish sport; commends the team on its thrilling 4-2 win over Denmark at Hampden Park, which secured qualification; acknowledges the quality and determination shown throughout the match, including Scott McTominay's early goal from an overhead kick, Lawrence Shankland's restoration of Scotland's lead in the second half, and the dramatic stoppage-time goals from Kieran Tierney and Kenny McLean, which sealed the result; further acknowledges the contribution of head coach, Steve Clarke, and all the staff supporting the national side; pays tribute to the Tartan Army for its passionate and positive backing of the team at home and abroad; notes the wider social, cultural and sporting benefits that participation in major international events can bring to communities across Scotland; wishes the national team every success as preparations begin for the 2026 World Cup finals; notes the pride that this achievement has brought to communities across Clackmannanshire and Stirling, and recognises the work of local clubs and volunteers in supporting grassroots football.

17:59

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): It is, of course, a genuine pleasure to open the debate. As a long-suffering Hibs fan, I want to say right at the start that if anyone had told me that one day I would be standing here celebrating a Scotland team that had qualified for the world cup thanks, in part, to a goal scored by Lawrence Shankland, given the team that he plays for, I would have said that they had spent too much time in the famous five stand hospitality—which is exactly what I did last Saturday.

However, football is full of surprises—and what a fantastic surprise this qualification has been for the whole country. It has given everybody a huge lift, and it will do so, I believe, all the way through to the group stages and beyond next year. For the first time in 28 years, Scotland is going to a FIFA world cup—and what a way for us to get there, with a 4-2 win over Denmark at Hampden. It was a match full of grit, flair and just enough nail-biting, buttock-clenching tension to confirm that—yes,

once again—it was Scotland trying to qualify for a world cup.

I remember previous world cups; most of us will have our own memories of them. The first one that I remember was 1970, but the first one that Scotland qualified for was 1974, when Scotland went out without losing a match—the only team ever to have done so at that point.

For the 1978 world cup, I actually had a favourite manager in Ally MacLeod. It is not a popular view, but I think that having somebody who was very confident—perhaps overconfident—and positive about Scotland was a refreshing change from some of our previous managers.

In 1982, I did not see any of the world cup matches, as I was in the Falklands. I possessed a high-frequency radio, so many people came to me to find out what the scores were, but I never saw any of the matches until many months later.

However, I go back to that most recent match, with Scott McTominay opening the scoring very shortly after the start, and, to finish the job, the stoppage-time strikes from Kieran Tierney—I still think that that was the best of all the goals scored on that night; there were three fantastic goals to pick from—and from Kenny McLean, scoring from his own half, which sent Hampden into joyful mayhem.

The tartan army are the most passionate, positive and musical—and occasionally sunburnt—supporters on earth. From Mount Florida to Munich, they carry Scotland and our hopes with them. At the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee last week, we heard about the good job that they did for Scotland and its international reputation at last year's European championships. We fully expect that they will do the same for us in north America next year.

As we celebrate this achievement, however, it is worth remembering that Scotland's football story did not begin in 1872, or even in 1978 with Archie Gemmill's hip-swivelling heroics. Our footballing heritage stretches back over almost five centuries. Just a few miles from my constituency sits Stirling castle, where, in 1981, workers repairing the Queen's chamber found a small leather ball stuffed with a pig's bladder wedged high in the rafters; it had been there since the 1540s. Today, it is recognised as the world's oldest surviving football and is proudly displayed at the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum.

In 2006, that same Stirling football went to the FIFA world cup, even though Scotland did not. It was there not to be kicked about, thankfully, but as part of a special exhibition in Germany celebrating the origins of the global game. Even before our modern national team made its return to the

biggest stage, a wee leather ball from Stirling castle had already flown the flag for Scotland at a world cup. Would it not be fitting if, at the next world cup, the oldest football in the world was once again piped on at the opening ceremony of the north American games?

It also speaks to something bigger: that Scotland has not just played, but shaped, football. Indeed, in my view, Scotland invented football. When the modern game began to spread around the world, it was often Scots who carried it. The so-called “Scotch professors”—players and coaches who travelled across Britain, Europe and south America in the late 19th century—taught the passing, team-based style that became the foundation of modern football.

One of them, Thomas Donohoe, even has a statue in Brazil to recognise his role in establishing the game there. It is quite something that, in the land of Pelé, they built a monument to a lad from Busby, and it is proof that Scotland’s influence on world football has been lasting, global and profound. I think that it is true to say that Pelé once said that Scotland invented football and Brazil perfected it.

It is a remarkable thing to stand in front of a ball that tells us that football in Scotland is not just a sport, but a thread woven through royalty and ordinary folk alike, through centuries of community life, long before offsides and the video assistant referee—VAR—and long before anyone shouted, “He’s no offside, referee—get your eyes checked” and all the stuff that we say these days. Somebody in Stirling castle leathered a ball that high to get it stuck on the roof. Perhaps it was miskicked by a courtier in an early attempt to avoid taking responsibility for a wayward pass. Nevertheless, it is hugely important that that ball—the oldest football in the world—was found in Scotland.

Just as it did with golf, Scotland gave the world the game of football. Ged O’Brien, the football professor, has referred to football being played in the 1500s in Scotland; indeed, there is reference to a game of football and attempts by landowners to stop the game being played.

So, when Andy Robertson goes up to lift the world cup, football will be truly “coming home”, as I think they call it. The humble leather ball connects the courtyard of Stirling castle to Hampden park and now to stadiums across north America.

Speaking of history, I should point out that Dunblane, in my constituency, has its own special place in Scotland’s world cup folklore. In 1978, the national team, before heading to Argentina, stayed at the Dunblane Hydro hotel—and who joined them? It was Rod Stewart, who recorded the world cup single “Ole Ola” with the squad. It was, in

many ways, the most Scottish thing imaginable: a glamorous superstar, a hopeful squad and a song that still echoes through karaoke machines to this day—though never quite in tune.

I remind members who might not be aware—because I bought it, and I still have it as a 45 single—that one of the lines is, “Ole ola”—

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): —we’re gonna bring the world cup back from over thar.

Keith Brown: —we’re gonna bring the world cup back from over thar. [Laughter.] So, “ola” rhymes with “thar”—there you go.

Anyway, as we look ahead, we now know exactly what awaits us in 2026. Scotland have been drawn in a group that will test us and excite us. Once again, we are playing our old adversaries, Brazil—I know that they were terrified of getting Scotland in the draw, but they have been unlucky once again.

We look forward to those matches, and they will give the tartan army two cracking destinations. Our opening matches will place Scotland on a global stage in two iconic cities: Boston, with its deep sporting culture and historic Scottish ties, and Miami, where I suspect that the tartan army will do its level best to out-sing the palm trees. Those are venues fit for a nation that is returning to the world cup with ambition and belief, and I have no doubt that the players will rise to the occasion, just as the supporters will.

However, our footballing spirit lives not only in history books or national anthems, but in grass-roots clubs, which are the lifeblood of our communities. Twice over the summer, I visited Sauchie Juniors Football Club, one of my local teams, to see the work that it does with young kids. Some of those kids are not even particularly interested in football, but they really value the time that they have, with some instruction, to be able to kick a ball around with their friends in some of the most deprived parts of my constituency. What Sauchie Juniors does is fantastic.

The same is true of Tullibody St Serf’s community club, also in my constituency—and I am sure that it will be true of clubs in many members’ constituencies. There are volunteers standing on touchlines in horizontal rain, washing kits, running minibuses and coaching young people who dream of becoming the next Andy Robertson or Caroline Weir—and let us hope that Scotland can succeed in hosting the FIFA women’s world cup in the future.

Without those individuals volunteering and carrying out so much of the work, there would be no national team, no Hampden roar and no world cup dream. That is why this qualification matters

so deeply: it lifts spirits, inspires young people and energises communities. In Clackmannanshire and Dunblane, and across Scotland, people have taken real pride from our national team reaching the finals. It connects our past, our present and the future that we want for our young people.

I have written to Mr Infantino, the president of FIFA, to ask whether we can get the ball taken across to the United States and on to the pitch at the first match. The president's son has already spoken very warmly of the fact that Scotland have qualified, so I am sure there will be a great deal of good will if he can do that.

Today, we congratulate Scotland's national team and Steve Clarke and his staff; we salute the tartan army; we celebrate the clubs and volunteers who keep the game alive; we honour a history that stretches from Stirling castle to south America; and we wish our team every success as preparations begin for the 2026 world cup.

And if Shankland scores the winner in the final—well, even as a Hibs fan, I promise that I will cheer.

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

18:09

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I take this opportunity to thank my friend and colleague, Keith Brown, for being the first off the starting blocks with his motion. I know that quite a few members lodged similar motions to secure a debate on the subject.

It is a great honour to talk about Scotland's qualification for the world cup finals. To be honest, if I cannot play for the team, I might as well watch and talk about them, and this is one of the best things that has happened to our national team in a long time.

I remind members that, of course, it all starts in Paisley, because Kenny McLean, John McGinn and Stevie Clarke all started their football careers at St Mirren. Members do not need to thank me too soon; I am quite willing to wait for them all to be grateful for the Paisley connection that has got us to the Americas for the world cup.

In my lifetime, Scotland has qualified seven times for world cup finals, most of them when I was in short trousers. My first adult world cup was in 1990; I watched, I suffered and I experienced what would become a lifetime of heartache.

We lost to Costa Rica 1-0, beat Sweden 2-1 and then went down to Brazil 1-0, courtesy of a scrappy goal in the 81st minute. I still have not quite got over that—I have never forgiven Jim Leighton, who was normally a very good

goalkeeper, for managing to let that goal in. Do not even ask me what I think about Gary McAllister's penalty against England in Euro 96—just do not mention his name.

I remember 1978, when—to be fair to the late, great Ally MacLeod—we had a fantastic team. However, we were beaten 3-1 by Peru. My dad started the game in the house in full Highland regalia; by half-time, he was in jeans and a T-shirt. Next, we drew 1-1 with Iran. Then there was that famous night against the Netherlands, which almost became the miracle of Mendoza when Archie Gemmill—from Glenburn in Paisley, incidentally; he started his career at St Mirren, too—became an absolute legend as he single-handedly took on a team that would go on to be beaten by Argentina in the final.

We went home too soon that time, but quite a few of the tartan army stayed behind and—if memory serves us all correctly—a few found love along the way. In 1982, there was more heartbreak. We were drawn against Brazil, again, and Dave Narey scored the famous “toe-poke”—as Jimmy Hill called it—to put Scotland ahead, out-Zicoing the great Zico, but then Zico equalised with a free kick of pure genius in the 33rd minute.

In 1986, in Mexico, Uruguay kicked us off the park. The emotional scars still remain, although I remember, in that world cup, Diego Maradona being rather handy.

By 1998, I was newly married to Stacey, and the opening game was—again—against Brazil. There seems to be a pattern there. John Collins equalised in the 38th minute, and Brazil replied with an own goal in the 74th. The pubs in Scotland erupted and Stacey and I celebrated as if we had actually won the world cup ourselves. That is what being a Scotland fan is all about. It is about the hope, the heartbreak, the fun—and above all, it is about our pride.

On 18 November this year, Stacey and I went to Hampden park, more in hope than expectation. By the 80th minute, Stacey whispered, “Do you want to leave early? We can get the car out of the car park at this point.” She clearly wanted to stay away from a meltdown with me stuck in the car park knowing that we had to go through the play-offs.

However, as a Scotland fan, I knew that we never do it the easy way—we never take the easy route—and in the 93rd and 98th minutes, the impossible became a reality. The tartan army celebrated as one, and—yes—Stacey's north-stand celebrations went a wee bit viral when I put them on the socials.

We are heading to the Americas, and the world will see what Scots can do. Bill Shankly famously said, “Some people think football is a matter of life

and death. I assure you it is much more serious than that." I can tell members that, at 56, I am just as excited about the world cup finals as I was in 1978—the only difference is that I am no longer obsessed with collecting Panini stickers for my album.

Football is important to Scots. It is more than a pastime—it is part of who we are. It brings communities together, defines our identity and inspires hope through the heartache. For many, it is what makes us Scottish. It is in the cheers, the tears and the shared memory of Archie Gemmill's goal, Dave Narey's toe-poke and the joy of Hampden on that cold November night.

Football is Scotland—football is our soul. It is what unites us, excites us and—yes—sometimes breaks our hearts, but it always reminds us of who we are. When the tartan army takes to the Americas, the world will see that, too. We Scots do not just play football—we live it. It is in our laughter, our pride, our stories—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Adam, I have been generous, but you will need to close.

George Adam: —and the bonds that are passed on from generation to generation. That is why football is more than a game to us. It is Scotland itself: it is our heritage—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you.

George Adam: —our joy, our heartbreak, our hope—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Adam. Thank you very much—

George Adam: —and it makes us Scots.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you.

Before I call the next speaker, I remind members that there is evidently a lot of interest in the debate, so back-bench speeches will be up to four minutes. That is what members signed up to when they volunteered their names to speak in the debate.

With that, I call Brian Whittle.

18:14

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Are we sitting comfortably, Deputy Presiding Officer?

I congratulate Keith Brown on getting out of the traps early in lodging the motion and securing the debate. I was going to come along tonight just to listen to the debate, and then I decided, why not bask one more time in the reflected glory of the Scotland team qualifying for the world cup?

As I have said previously in the chamber—unfortunately, the member in question has just left the chamber—I watched the match in the

Parliament bar, as we had all just piled out of a committee meeting, with Stuart McMillan, Liam McArthur and the indomitable, the indefatigable, the inimitable and the inflatable Kenny Gibson, who went from the mild-mannered gentleman we all know and love to a complete maniac. The fact that the four of us were jumping about crazy in the Parliament bar—four people who members might not expect to be together—and the way in which we collectively celebrated the result tells us everything about football and about sport.

The other reason why I wanted to speak in the debate was that I knew that George Adam would be speaking, and I wanted to remind him that a Scottish Tory was his childhood hero and that a Scottish Tory also coached his beloved St Mirren. I am taking some of the glory for St Mirren—that strangled route through St Mirren into the Scotland team.

Those of us who are of a certain vintage reflect back on a time when we always qualified for the world cup. The first world cup that I remember as a kid was in 1974, with Billy Bremner, Peter Lorimer and so on. I got to play golf with Peter Lorimer in Montrose one day—what a gentleman he was. I always remember 1974—as has been said, we came out as the only undefeated team. I always picture, in my head, Billy Bremner sliding in at the back post and knocking the ball against the post, when we could have actually won. I also remember when we had to beat Yugoslavia. They went 1-0 up, and then Scotland gave us hope—as they always do—towards the end of the match when they equalised, but we did not go through.

With Ally's army, in 1978, we were going to win the world cup. He convinced the whole of Scotland, me included, that we were going to win. I remember Joe Jordan scoring for us to go 1-0 up against Peru, and then they equalised. Don Masson missed a penalty and they went 2-1 up, with Scotland eventually losing 3-1.

However, 1978 gave us one of the best goals that we will ever see: Archie Gemmill's goal against Holland. Again, Scotland gave us hope—that glimmer of hope—but they never quite get there. I remember 1982, 1986 and 1998—and, now, here we are again, on our way to lift the world cup.

I just want to say, on a serious note, that we have a fantastic summer of sport coming our way with the Commonwealth games and the world cup. I hope that we do not just grasp the opportunity to be Scotland, the passionate watchers of football, but use it to create opportunities for our youngsters, who are inspired to take part by our great athletes and footballers. We have to use these fantastic experiences to give our kids those opportunities. I ask the Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy and Sport if she will tell us, in her

closing remarks, how we will ensure that there is a legacy from those fantastic events.

Once again, I congratulate my friend and colleague Keith Brown on bringing the debate to the chamber.

18:19

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank Keith Brown for lodging the motion for debate, which I was delighted to support. As was mentioned earlier, a number of motions were lodged the day after Scotland qualified—I think that there were more motions lodged than we scored goals against Denmark.

Scotland's qualification has united the Parliament and the country, and rightly so. It has been a long 27-year wait, but we finally have a world cup to look forward to, in 2026, when we can cheer on our men's national team.

This is a massive achievement, and huge congratulations must go to Steve Clarke, the whole squad and the coaching staff for their incredible effort. The team were fantastic, topping group C and scoring 13 goals. I have no doubt that Scott McTominay's overhead kick, Kieran Tierney's screamer—I agree with Keith Brown that that was the best goal of them all—and Kenny McLean's ridiculous goal from the halfway line against Denmark are moments that we will be talking about for many years to come.

It is absolutely right that we celebrate our home-grown talent and our achievements. Like George Adam, I think that we need to give a special nod to former St Mirren players John McGinn and Kenny McLean, who both played an invaluable part in that success.

There is no doubt that all the men on the park and those behind the scenes played their part, too, but, as others have said, we also need to pay credit to members of the tartan army and all the fans who continue to back the team following years of ups and downs. They never gave up and have given the team and the manager fantastic support.

To see the celebrations of the fans being shared across the world was something special. That is why I was disappointed by UEFA's initial decision to remove social media videos of fans celebrating. Quite often, there is an ugly side to social media, so to take down such content was wrong. I called out UEFA for that decision and asked it to think again. Thankfully, it has seen sense and has apologised to Scotland fans.

Last Friday, most of us were glued to our televisions watching the world cup draw. Maybe the less said about the event side of the draw the better, but I have to say that, with Brazil, Morocco

and Haiti, we are in a good group. We should look forward to that, and I know that the current squad has nothing to fear.

I add my voice to the growing concerns about ticket prices. Dynamic pricing should have absolutely no place in our game, and tickets should be affordable, because football without fans is nothing.

This tournament is more than just a sporting event; as we have heard, it is a profound cultural moment. For every Scot under the age of 30, this will be the first world cup that they remember our men's team competing in. As Brian Whittle rightly said, it is an opportunity to inspire a generation. We must use it as a catalyst to invest in our young people in order to match their ambition with a lasting legacy. It would be helpful to hear from the minister whether the Scottish Government intends to keep its commitment to double the sports budget to £100 million in this parliamentary session, because that would enable this event to leave a lasting legacy for future generations of Scots.

To make this a truly shared national celebration, we must also facilitate participation for fans who will not be able to travel to North America. Although the kick-off times are late here—or early in the morning—I urge local authorities and licensing boards to consider what they can do to bring people together to watch the games here. This is a moment for our nation to come together, to unite, to celebrate and to enjoy. Let us ensure that the world cup next year is open to everyone, whether at home or abroad.

All that is left to say is to wish Steve Clarke and the whole team the very best ahead of next summer.

18:23

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): On Tuesday 18 November, I arrived at Hampden park for the opening of the gates at 6.15. I walked in with a few other early birds and stood thinking what the stadium would be like at 9.45. Four minutes in, after the Scott McTominay wonder goal, the dream was on. Then, Denmark scores and the old fears return. Shankland scores again. Hopes rise. Denmark scores again. Six minutes of injury time goes up and even now I feel good about our chances. The ball falls to Kieran Tierney. What a strike, what a feeling! Eight minutes into six minutes of injury time, and the nerves are shot. Kenny McLean wins the ball and shoots. What an incredible feeling as the ball hits the back of the net—"Freed from Desire" blasts out and it sinks in: Scotland have qualified. The passion and love for football is unrivalled. The whole country goes crazy; scenes from pubs and

homes are shown from all over Scotland. My flights and accommodation are booked. The ticket scramble now awaits.

What does qualifying for the world cup mean to football more generally in Scotland? It means a few things. It must leave a legacy for our youth game, with investment in the grass roots and, of course, the elite youth set-up—I say that as someone who had the pleasure to coach at that level with Hibernian for 11 years. I note that the Scottish Football Association recently announced that it will not continue its performance schools, which produced players such as Billy Gilmour. There is also talk of reducing support to Club Academy Scotland's youth academies, which would be a retrograde step. We need further investment in those academies, so that players can play for our clubs at a younger age. We need further investment in the women's and girls' clubs and academies. The success of the investment in academies by the French Football Federation and the English Football Association demonstrates that. On the back of the financial benefits of the world cup, we need to invest in our youth game and our women's game, and we will reap the benefits of doing so.

Many of us have campaigned for Scotland matches to be shown on terrestrial television. Thankfully, a deal was agreed before the Denmark game, which meant that those who were not fortunate enough to have tickets could enjoy—and endure—every minute of the qualifying campaign on BBC Scotland, and a generation of Scotland fans were able to witness something that they had never witnessed before in their lifetime. However, in the aftermath of that game, one thing that was overlooked was that the deal with the BBC to broadcast the qualifying matches ran only until the end of that campaign, and it is likely that future qualifying campaigns will again be available only on subscription services. I believe that the home nations' international matches and women's competitive matches should be available for all to watch and should be included in Ofcom's list of category A sporting events, which must be shown on free-to-air television.

We all know that the members of our magnificent Scotland team are huge role models for our children and young people, and they will no doubt inspire our next generation of football players. Along with that, however, come responsibilities, one of which is the responsibility to stop exploiting children on behalf of the alcohol industry. Big alcohol brands, familiar and not so familiar, will be queuing at the door of Scotland's football authorities to sponsor the team and to get their brands in front of the customers of today and tomorrow. That type of marketing is designed to boost sales by attracting new consumers and targeting heavy drinkers, but it also results in

young people starting to consume alcohol at an earlier age and increases the chances of binge drinking. I expect and encourage the football authorities to take their responsibilities seriously and reject alcohol sponsorship in favour of industries that do less harm in our country.

I thank Keith Brown for lodging the motion. We all know the passion that football inspires, and, like Keith Brown, I am a long-suffering Hibs fan. Let us enjoy the build-up to the world cup. As they say: no Scotland, no party.

18:26

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Keith Brown for lodging the motion. As others have said, what a moment for Scotland, for sport and for football. We are a nation of football fans, and on that night in November, many of us were on the edge of our seats. The motion says that the game was “thrilling”, but my husband and my children said that it was more nerve-wracking than thrilling.

Over the next six months, we will discuss our chances, debate the draw, look at who we will be playing, where we will be playing, how we get tickets and how those of us who are in Scotland will manage the time difference—I am sure that many of us will need to set timers and alarms to make sure that we see all the games, as the United States has various time zones.

What a moment it was for Scottish sport, but also what a moment it is for health, wellbeing and football right across Scotland, not just for the elite sport that we see in our men's football. Seeing role models like the players who took part in the game that night on our televisions, on social media, in magazines and at events is important. I hope that the Scottish football authorities, our elite footballers and the Government will use this great opportunity to make decisions that support our communities to be active, healthy and quite hopeful. I hope that all involved will see that they have a responsibility to use this chance to promote wellbeing and, as Keith Brown has said, the work of our volunteers across football and other sports. It is important to recognise everybody who comes together to make sure that all those things happen for our nation.

I have really enjoyed everybody's speeches. I congratulate the national men's team, thank them for the joy and ask them to ensure that their participation in the world cup leaves a long-lasting legacy for the health and wellbeing of Scotland as a nation.

18:29

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I, too,

congratulate Keith Brown on securing this debate. Having confessed previously and publicly that sport, either as a participant or fan, is not in my DNA, colleagues might wonder—or perhaps not—why I have opted to speak in this debate. My motivation was that there appeared to be not one woman down to speak, and I thought that I had better step in, so I welcome the company of Carol Mochan. Even the sport-immune Christine Grahame cheered at the Scotland team securing that elusive place in the world cup, and doing it with such style, so here I am.

At first, it seemed that defeat was going to be snatched from the jaws of victory, which is so often the way of things with a Scotland team, but then—wow—those two extraordinary goals. The team played with heart and determination as well as flair. I will come to what that means for youth football but, first, I will say that I have been here before. I embraced Ally's army during the 1978 world cup. Then, it was about panache, style and razzamatazz and not so much about skill. We were all full to the brim with the overrated and oversold expectations of the charismatic Ally MacLeod—bless him.

I repeat that today's squad have heart and determination as well as skills. Their impact on the younger generations will be hugely positive.

Penicuik Athletic Football Club has been part of the town since 1888, built on volunteers, families and local sponsors. Penicuik Athletic Youth Football Club now runs more than 20 boys and girls teams—from the tiny early touches for four and five-year-olds through to the teenagers—so hundreds of young people are growing up active and confident. Football also gives them a place to belong.

It is not just about boys football anymore; girls football in Penicuik is booming, with dedicated squads in multiple age groups, matching the national picture, where female participation is now at a record high.

Arniston Rangers Youth Football Club in Gorebridge has some 300 youngsters between the ages of 2 and 16 playing. The number is growing rapidly each year given Gorebridge's ever-expanding population, mostly of young families. There are games for many age groups, with Gore Glen being a great place to watch football each weekend. There is a girls section, with teams playing across age groups.

Brian Whittle: I cannot pass up the opportunity to welcome you into the fold of sport, now that you have been converted to recognise the power of sport.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Christine Grahame: I do not quite know how to react. That went a wee bit too far in praising me, but I will take it.

The Arniston club has a home at Gore Glen pavilion and an astro facility at Arniston park. Next, I hope that we will see boys and girls teams running right through the youth age groups.

Football is not just about the Hampdens, roaring full on a Saturday, but about local parks that are bursting with excitable teams and youngsters. There are more than 160,000 grass-roots players across the country. Most of them are under 18—all dreaming, playing, learning, and building the future of the game.

The Scotland team is an inspiration to those youngsters and—I say this to Mr Whittle—as a sports agnostic, I wish the Scotland team and our ambassadors, the tartan army, well.

18:33

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate, and I thank Keith Brown for lodging the motion.

What a fantastic achievement from Steve Clarke and the team. Before I reflect on that amazing Tuesday night a few weeks ago, I want to, as others have done, think back to the last time we were at the world cup, particularly to 10 June 1998. I was in sixth year at Coatbridge high school, and I remember the buzz that day. Everybody had their “See you, Jimmy” hats on—they were the thing at the time—and, of course, the school closed early to let everyone go home and get ready for the game.

I recall getting changed in PE, which was the last lesson, and everybody could not wait to get home. I walked the short distance—about a mile or so—between the school and my house. When I got back to our street, my dad had put Scotland flags up on a rope that went between my house and what was my gran's house at the time, on the other side of the street. It was an unbelievable feeling that day. Even the narrow defeat by Brazil, as others have mentioned, could not dampen all our spirits.

However, what none of us knew on 10 June 1998 was that we would wait 28 years to do it again. During that time, the men's team have been to two Euros, under the stewardship of Steve Clarke, and the women's team flew the flag at the world cup. I enjoyed each of those tournaments, where the boys and girls did us really proud, but I think that there is something extra special about the men's world cup, probably because it is the original one and has that prestige—I think that we can all feel it.

The buzz around the nation for the world cup is going to be amazing, whether you are there or at home. I hope that that buzz lasts right up until 19 July. As others have said, who knows?

A couple of weeks ago, I was there with my eldest son, Ceard, who has been with me at all the home games in recent years. Some were great and some were not—car trips, bus trips, traffic jams, pouring rain and the Georgia game. It was all worth it for that night.

I had a feeling that we were going to make the tournament, but nobody could have written just how it worked out. It was an amazing conclusion to the game, and I am going to admit on the record that I had a wee cry when I came out of the stadium that night. I do not really know why. Ceard said, “Dad, why are you crying? You should be happy.” I said, “Yes, I am happy.”

I am sure that my screen time went up rapidly in the days afterwards as I caught those goals over and over again. They were some of the most amazing goals in Scotland’s history and all in one game. As everyone is picking their favourite goal, mine was McTominay’s.

I have some more serious requests for the Government that come out of this debate. I know that some of them are not the minister’s responsibility, which is fair enough, but the debate gives us a wee chance to raise them. First, we need to harness this moment for the grass-roots game. Through my work on the future of football in Scotland cross-party group, I know that grass-roots football has major problems, such as access to pitches and access for those with disabilities. The growing girls game also needs more space. I still hope to bring a members’ debate on that issue before the end of the session, but I believe that we need to capture this moment to improve things for the next generation. If we do not do that, how long will we wait for another? That is really important.

Other members have mentioned licensing hours. I know that that is not the minister’s responsibility, but the times are what they are. Local pubs would probably appreciate some clarity from the Government on that, although there is an election between now and the tournament taking place. Whether it is pubs or other events, it is important to give our businesses a financial boost.

Paul McLennan raised the issue of TV rights. We need to continue that campaign, because it is important that our men’s and women’s international games are on free-to-view TV.

Finally, I request that the Scottish Government continues to be a voice for good in the run-up to this global event. Tickets need to be affordable. We need to put our voice to that. The ticket prices are shocking. The world cup should be for everyone, regardless of nationality, race, sexuality,

religion or anything else, without exception. If there are any concerns about that, we should be the first to speak out against it. I am sure that it will be for everybody. It is a showcase event, and it needs to be for absolutely everybody in the world who wants to be involved in it.

I will end by simply congratulating Steve Clarke and the Scotland men’s team on a fantastic achievement. I cannot wait until next summer to see how far we get, and I am sure that it will be far.

18:37

The Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy and Sport (Maree Todd): I thank everyone who has contributed to a lovely debate. It clearly means a lot to members in the chamber and people across the country. It is estimated that 900,000 people a week engage with football in Scotland, which is not bad for a nation of 5.5 million people. The Scottish premiership’s 18.5 attendees per 1,000 people at last season’s matches was the greatest attendance in Europe, by a country mile. In fact, it was 70 per cent higher than the next highest attendance in football. Football holds a special place in the nation’s hearts.

This evening, we have recognised the historic significance of the achievement of Steve Clarke and his squad. A whole generation has grown up without seeing Scotland’s men participating in the world cup finals, while wishing we were there. Of course, the women made it in 2019 and, as in all things, I commend the men for following our lead.

Since 1998, which was the last time that the men’s national team graced the world’s biggest stage, football has evolved. Nations have risen and fallen, but Scotland’s dream has endured. Our qualification ends a 28-year drought and marks a historic comeback for the tartan army. It is a reminder that perseverance pays off and that the spirit of Scottish football is as strong as ever.

I am sure that everyone was glued to their screens on Friday night, perhaps for a little longer than we anticipated, watching the draw. When we finally got to it, we were, once again, drawn to face Brazil and Morocco, with an opening match against Haiti in Boston. The match times are not ideal for those of us watching here in Scotland, but I am confident that we will manage.

The emotional and personal impact that football can have cannot be overstated. In fact, I have been thinking back to five-year-old me, who was pretty invested in Ally’s army and fully expected us to lift the cup in 1978. The way in which we qualified this year will live for ever in Scottish folklore. In the space of a few days, we went from losing in Greece and facing a potentially difficult

play-off route, to that dramatic 4-2 win—over a really good Denmark team—sealed with two fantastic stoppage-time goals. Andy Robertson called it

“one of the greatest nights of my life”,

and dedicated the achievement to his late teammate Diogo Jota. I am sure that many fans who watched that game also considered it to be one of the greatest nights of their lives. Across Scotland, pubs, homes and streets erupted in celebration.

This is more than football. It is a unifying force for the nation. It is about mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, grandparents and grandchildren all sharing a moment that binds us together.

Keith Brown reminded us that Scotland is home to the oldest football in the world and that our passion for the game in Scotland was taken to South America, where Brazil and Argentina also caught the bug. Scotland and England played the first officially recognised international football match. Scotland invented the modern game, and we wrote the rules down. Therefore, it is no wonder that our nation is so excited about our qualification. We love football and have done so for a very long time.

We know that the economic and social impacts of participating in the finals can be significant. Scotland’s qualification secures multimillion-pound payments from FIFA—funds that can transform grass-roots development and youth academies.

Crucially, qualification inspires the next generation. Young players now see a pathway to the biggest stage, fuelling participation and ambition.

We also need to harness the excitement and anticipation around the world cup to encourage people to get out and be active and play sports with their friends or meet new friends. We know that engaging in regular physical activity is one of the best things that we can do to maintain and improve our physical and mental health, and moments such as this can inspire people to do that.

I am very glad to hear of Neil Bibby’s commitment to doubling the sport budget, and I look forward to Labour demanding extra investment in sport during the budget negotiations and, crucially, voting for it this year. Thousands of Scottish fans will also be inspired.

Neil Bibby: I very clearly asked the minister whether she would provide clarity on whether the Scottish Government would meet its promise to double the sports budget in this session of Parliament. The sports budget was £50 million in 2021 and it is still around £50 million. Will the Scottish Government meet the promised target?

Maree Todd: That is certainly still our ambition, Mr Bibby, but, as I said, it would be much appreciated if Labour would, this year, engage in the negotiations and, crucially, vote for any extra investment that is forthcoming.

Thousands of Scottish fans will be inspired to travel to north America, showcasing our nation and culture on a global stage. Euro 2024 will be remembered for many things, although, from our point of view, perhaps not for the actual football. Above all, it will be remembered for the fans and, among them, one group stood out—the tartan army. Scotland might not have lifted the trophy, but, my goodness, we conquered German hearts and won those of the world. From Munich to Cologne to Stuttgart, the Scots brought joy, humour and music. German newspapers piled on the praise. One of them wrote,

“Dear Scots: We love you”,

and even the German police thanked the fans for creating a special atmosphere. The impact goes beyond the tournament. VisitScotland reported an 83 per cent surge in German traffic to its website during Euro 2024. Scotland’s image as a warm, vibrant nation was amplified globally. That is soft power at its finest—football as a bridge between cultures. The world cup represents an opportunity to put Scotland on the centre stage and make those connections on the global stage. We will look to make the most of those opportunities.

Our US-based colleagues are already turning their minds to planning and engagement, so that we can maximise the economic, tourism, trade, investment and diplomatic opportunities that come with participating in the finals. Needless to say, I love Keith Brown’s idea for the world’s oldest football to be piped on to the centre stage in the opening ceremony, and I am sure that the Scottish Government will do everything that we can to make that happen.

I want to take a moment to recognise that this is also a really exciting moment in time for women’s football in Scotland, not least the Hibs women, who are bringing to light the Hibeas in this chamber. On 28 November, the four home nations submitted a bid to host the FIFA women’s world cup in 2035. This would be a transformational opportunity for women’s and girls’ football, driven by passionate fans, strong media reach and innovative digital engagement. It would ensure not just a successful tournament but growth and reinvestment in the women’s game. What an incentive it is for those young players who are starting their football journey to dream about playing in that tournament in front of a home crowd. It is therefore a very exciting time to be a Scotland fan.

When Scotland walks out in North America next summer, the team will carry not just a football dream but the hopes of a nation that is ready to write a new chapter in its history. This qualification is not the end—it is the beginning. It is a chance to inspire, invest and unite. I wish Steve Clarke and his squad the very best of luck. Scotland is back, and the world will take notice.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:47.

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